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Behind Person of the Year

WE ARE NEARING A CENTURY OF PERSON of the Year, the franchise TIME's editors launched as a make-good at the end of 1927, after realizing they had failed to mark Charles Lindbergh's history-making transatlantic flight on the cover. It is our privilege to work on a project that has, across those years, become a milestone and, yes, a lightning rod. Like much of what we do at TIME, this issue is an opportunity to be in conversation with history while embracing the future with arms wide open.

It takes hundreds of people to make Person of the Year possible, from those of us in the newsroom to our colleagues across TIME's business, including our CEO Jessica Sibley. For the second year in a row, Person of the Year was led by Kelly Conniff, who is entering her 13th year at TIME. Kelly guides the staff through months of debate and assignments until we reach our final destination. She was assisted by many including Lori Fradkin, Lily Rothman, Annabel Gutterman, and D.W. Pine.

The story on Donald Trump was written and reported by Eric Cortellessa, who covers the Republican Party and its leaders for TIME. Massimo Calabresi, Alex Altman, and I joined Eric for the interview with Trump on Nov. 25. Trump has sat with TIME journalists for extensive interviews over the past nine years; the results of those interviews have provided valuable insight for our readers.

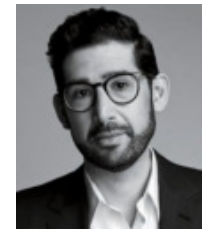
The profile of CEO of the Year Lisa Su was written by Billy Perrigo, reporting from Santa Clara, Calif., on Nov. 6; last year, Billy co-wrote the CEO of the Year profile on OpenAI's Sam Altman. Sean Gregory's streak of writing or co-writing all of TIME's Athlete of the Year profiles remains unbroken. He interviewed Caitlin Clark in Indianapolis on Nov. 4. Belinda Luscombe, who joined TIME's original parent company in 1992, interviewed Icon of the Year Elton John in New York City and at Woodside, his home in Old Windsor, England, in November.

PLATON AT WORK ON THE PERSON OF THE YEAR SHOOT AT MAR-A-LAGO ON NOV. 25

We are fortunate to work with the best photographers in the world. Donald Trump was photographed by Platon, who has taken more than 20 covers—and last created the cover image for Person of the Year in 2007. Clark was photographed by Cass Bird, a giant of contemporary fashion and art photography. Elton John was photographed by Miles Aldridge, whose father, artist Alan Aldridge, created the cover for John's 1975 album *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy.* Su was photographed by Guerin Blask. Their work was photo edited by Katherine Pomerantz, Dilys Ng, and Kara Milstein. Design for this issue was overseen by Rich Morgan and video by Justine Simons.

AS *TIME* HAS EVOLVED, so too have the many forms in which we present this issue. The night before we closed this magazine, we gathered for our annual "A Year in TIME" event in New York City. Led by Dan Macsai, Cate Matthews, and Jeff Smith, the event featured onstage conversations with Clark and Su and a performance by John. There, we also celebrated the first decade of our Next Generation Leaders program, created in partnership with Rolex.

Finally, a note on the future: this year we are debuting TIME AI, a new initiative led by TIME COO Mark Howard in partnership with Scale AI, with our Person of the Year coverage. We've been covering the rise of generative AI across industries in our reporting, and now we are helping TIME's readers experience our journalism with it. Visit our website to experience TIME's Person of the Year reporting translated into seven languages, as well as via audio and a new conversation-based interface.



MIKE FOLEY

Sam Jacobs,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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A Year in TIME

The night before the 2024 Person of the Year was announced, TIME hosted a star-studded dinner in New York City, coinciding with the rollout of this issue. The Dec. 11 event featured conversations with 2024 CEO of the Year Lisa Su *(right),* moderated by editor-in-chief Sam Jacobs, and with Athlete of the Year Caitlin Clark *(left),* moderated by NBC sportscaster Maria Taylor. To close out the night, Icon of the Year—Emmy-, Grammy-, Oscar-, and Tony-winning musical legend Elton John *(top)*—performed "Your Song."

Ringing the bell

On the morning his selection as Person of the Year was announced, President-elect Donald Trump rang the bell to open the New York Stock Exchange, alongside TIME CEO Jessica Sibley *(second from left).* He was joined onstage by his wife Melania Trump and other members of his family, plus incoming Vice President J.D. Vance and Cabinet picks Lee Zeldin, Scott Turner, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and Scott Bessent.

On the covers

Photograph by Platon for TIME

Photograph by Guerin Blask for TIME

Photograph by Cass Bird for TIME

Photographs by Miles Aldridge for TIME

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Dreamer of the Year

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LT. DAMON SIMMONS, PORTLAND FIRE & RESCUE

THE FEARLESS FIRST RESPONDERS OF DISASTER RECOVERY

For the third year in a row, TIME and American Family Insurance have partnered to recognize the **Dreamer of the Year** – a person or group working tirelessly to protect or restore dreams.

We are thrilled to recognize **Portland Fire and Rescue, American Family Insurance Claims and Sales Teams, Omaha** and **Rebuilding Together, Tampa Bay,** together as the 2024 Dreamer of the Year.

These teams fundamentally understand that helping families and communities rebuild from climate-related crises truly takes a village. This year's group lives out that ethos every single day, restoring not just homes and infrastructure, but the dreams that dwell within. From outsized hurricanes to devastating fires and tornadoes, we're celebrating the real-life heroes among us who fearlessly face disasters. This recovery work cannot happen in a vacuum; it takes many helping hands and hearts to rebuild the homes and dreams of everyday people – especially in such dark moments.

We visited this year's honorees to learn first-hand about their incredible efforts to protect and reconstruct communities in the wake of unprecedented climate disasters.

These are their stories.

For over two decades in Tampa Bay, Florida, Rebuilding Together has worked to prepare, relieve and recover homes impacted by catastrophic hurricanes and storms that upend lives overnight. The group preserves affordable homeownership and revitalizes neighborhoods with free home repairs for those in need.

This year, the team made headlines for donating hurricane relief kits, advocating for greater hurricane awareness and preparedness and completing long-term recovery projects. After hurricanes Helene and Milton slammed into Florida this fall, Rebuilding Together

CANDICE CORNISH & TYLER SHAW, REBUILDING TOGETHER, TAMPA BAY

Tampa Bay continues to help homeowners recover and make repairs. "Having a safe and healthy home is where everything starts. Home is the American dream," shared Executive Director José García. Rebuild Together is all about working in solidarity to provide stability for families, no matter how long that takes.

Meanwhile in Omaha, the American Family Insurance claims support team isn't simply focused on processing claims; they're also mindful of having heart and injecting hope one person, one house and one family at a time. Guiding people through the claims process requires kindness and patience, and helping families piece together whatever is left is a delicate, empathic task. This is what makes the claims support team the backbone of American Family Insurance, providing on-the-ground, immediate support to customers and their families in their most dire moments.

In Blair, Nebraska, American Family Insurance was first in and last out, responding to the destruction from April 2024's EF-4 tornado. The severe damage brought together claims

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JONI SCHULTZ & WENDY SCHEPER, AMERICAN FAMILY INSURANCE

JOSE GARCIA, REBUILDING TOGETHER, TAMPA BAY

professional Wendy Scheper and Joni Schultz, Sales Director for Kansas and Nebraska, to help the community in the immediate aftermath. As a local resident, Joni was home when the tornado hit and saw the damage firsthand. As soon as it was safe, she not only volunteered to direct traffic in the rain, but went house to house to offer her professional insurance perspective in the darkest of hours. It was a uniquely gratifying experience to be both a friend and a resource, all at once. Scheper, who traveled from Madison, WI to Blair in order to help on the ground, always leans into hope during these times: "[I can be someone] that helps bring the clarity that while this may be the worst day that you're experiencing right now, tomorrow will be better."

A few months after the tornado in Blair, The Portland Fire and Rescue team in Oregon were put to the test as fire ripped through the state, destroying 1.4 million acres in its wake. As ever, Portland Fire and Rescue was there to face this head on. Fighting a multitude of fires, crews endured triple-digit temperatures and sleepless nights to protect lives, homes and businesses. Four different wildfires snowballed into a "megafire" over the summer of 2024, but that didn't stop Portland Fire and Rescue from their mission: Fight flames and fight to protect the

DAN WATSON, PORTLAND FIRE & RESCUE

KIM KOSMAS, PORTLAND FIRE & RESCUE

lives and memories within the community. "As firefighters, our job every day is to protect people's dreams," says Lieutenant Damon Simmons. "That firefighter doing those bucket drops knew he was making a difference."

Taken together, these are stories about the restoration of dreams. Each community, challenged by such extraordinary forces of nature, was saved by these fearless Dreamers – champions who didn't waver in the face of disaster but instead found a contagious inner resilience. They leaned into the power of teamwork to restore lives and futures, no matter how difficult.

What's more, unbreakable bonds were formed through recovery efforts. Cross-state firefighters became like family. Tampa volunteers felt deeply fulfilled by helping strangers regain a sense of normalcy. Insurance teams experienced heartfelt gratitude from families in their own community. In confronting climate disaster, an enduring sense of fellowship – where care and compassion are as impactful as the recovery work itself – is the ultimate tie that binds.

This year's Dreamers prove that disaster recovery isn't just about rebuilding homes. It's also about restoring hope and protecting all of our dreams.

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The End Of an Era

Last year's Person of the Year, Taylor Swift, closes out her record-smashing tour

BY MEGAN MCCLUSKEY

THE ERAS TOUR MORE THAN DOUBLED THE GROSS OF THE NEXT MOST PROFITABLE TOUR IN HISTORY

MORE THAN 630 DAYS AFTER TAYLOR Swift's Eras Tour kicked off on March 17, 2023, in Glendale, Ariz., the global concert phenomenon came to an end with three final shows in Vancouver on Dec. 6–8. In the nearly two years since Eras began, Swift's accomplishments have been numerous, from dropping three albums to being named TIME's 2023 Person of the Year to releasing the most successful concert film ever. The tour also helped turn her into the first musician to become a billionaire solely from songwriting and performing. It's safe to say there's never been a concert tour quite like this one. To mark the anniversary of her Person of the Year title, here's a numerical look back at Swift's blockbuster shows.

Number of Eras shows and cities
In total, Swift played 149 shows across five continents and 51 cities worldwide. Of those, 62 took place in the U.S. The remainder were part of the tour's Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Canada legs.

Number of Eras tickets sold
Following the final Vancouver show on Dec. 8, Swift's team reported that the singer had sold 10,168,008 tickets across her 149 sold-out performances for an average of 68,241 tickets per show. (Those totals would have been higher if Swift hadn't had to cancel three shows in Vienna in August because of safety concerns over terrorist threats.)

Total Eras Tour gross
Eras sold an astronomical total of over $2.078 billion in tickets, according to Swift's production company, making it the first tour to not only cross the $1 billion mark but also more than double that benchmark. That's more than the forecasted 2024 GDP of 18 small countries. For comparison, the second highest grossing tour of all time, Elton John's nearly five-year Farewell Yellow Brick Road Tour, sold 6 million tickets across 328 shows to earn $939 million.

Total Eras merch revenue
Going by sales reports from assorted venues, *Pollstar* estimates Eras attendees were spending an average of $40 per person on merch at the first 60 Eras shows. That puts Swift's tour-merch revenue at an estimated $406.7 million—not including non-concert-day purchases—following her final run of 2024 Eras dates.

***The Eras Tour Book* sales**
Leading up to Eras' final weekend, Swift released a 256-page coffee-table book containing over 500 photos and anecdotes from the tour. Despite being available for purchase only through one retailer, Target, the $40 *Eras Tour Book* sold 814,000 copies in its first two days, according to industry data provider Circana BookScan. That's the second highest number of books sold in a single week since BookScan began tracking sales in 2001, surpassed in the nonfiction category only by Barack Obama's *A Promised Land*, which sold 816,000 copies when it first went on sale in 2020. ◻

EMMA MCINTYRE—TAS24/TAS RIGHTS MANAGEMENT/GETTY IMAGES

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From pygmy hippo Moo Deng to Pesto the penguin, cute creatures did more than just take over the internet in 2024

BY CHAD DE GUZMAN

MOO DENG. IT'S A NAME MILLIONS around the world have come to know. She's the most obsessed-over, least controversial celebrity. Her dewy skin, enviable lifestyle of frolicking and feasting, and eminently meme-able face have made her an icon of the internet. She's also … a hippopotamus.

Cute creatures going viral is nothing new. Seven years ago, the Cincinnati Zoo wanted TIME to name Fiona the hippo Person—er, Animal?—of the Year. But 2024 seems to be on a different level.

The plump pygmy hippo from Thailand—who was born in July and whose name translates to "bouncy pork"—rose to fame perhaps when she was needed most. "Observing animals, whether online or in person, can be therapeutic in many ways," University of Washington psychology professor emeritus David Barash tells TIME. Beasts can provide a comforting distraction when people are "depressed by the state of the world." And distract Moo Deng did.

What started as simply a new subject of photos and videos posted on Khao Kheow Open Zoo's social media platforms quickly snowballed into the world's latest It girl. Social media users obsessed over every new documentation of her teething and tumbling, and the zoo's followers skyrocketed. Moo Deng inspired fan art, merchandise, even makeup trends. Foot traffic to the zoo hit record highs, and a 24/7 livestream was set up for round-the-clock viewing. In September, she was parodied on *Saturday Night Live*. In November, GMM, one of Thailand's largest music companies, produced a multilingual theme song for her.

Tony Sampson, a digital-media researcher at the University of Essex, defines digital virality as "affective contagion." In other words, posts that make you *feel* something tend to spread better than purely informational posts. "Negative emotions like anger and frustration spread well too," he says, noting a surge in "downbeat posts" related to politics and conflicts. "But maybe people need to escape that sometimes."

MOO DENG MAKES A SPLASH

LAUREN DECICCA—GETTY IMAGES

IT'S NO WONDER, then, that Moo Deng was not alone this year in attracting the world's attention. A cohort of adorable animals have joined her in the online spotlight—from Pesto the penguin to Nibi the beaver to fellow pygmy hippo Haggis. The list goes on, but one thing these social media sensations appear to have in common is people like to ascribe human-like traits to them.

The most popular Moo Deng posts often center around likening her to a toddler, as she finds her footing or calls for her mom. One post even suggested she carried a leaf around on her snout for emotional support. Anthropomorphism can sometimes misread what animals are actually going through, Barash warns. But the fact that much of Moo Deng's appeal seems to stem from her perceived relatability isn't necessarily a bad thing, he adds—and it isn't always off base.

"Fortunately, animal behaviorists are increasingly comfortable recognizing the obvious: that many animals share a wide range of mental states with human beings," Barash says. Maybe we could all do with our own emotional-support leaf. Or maybe Moo Deng is already just that. ◻

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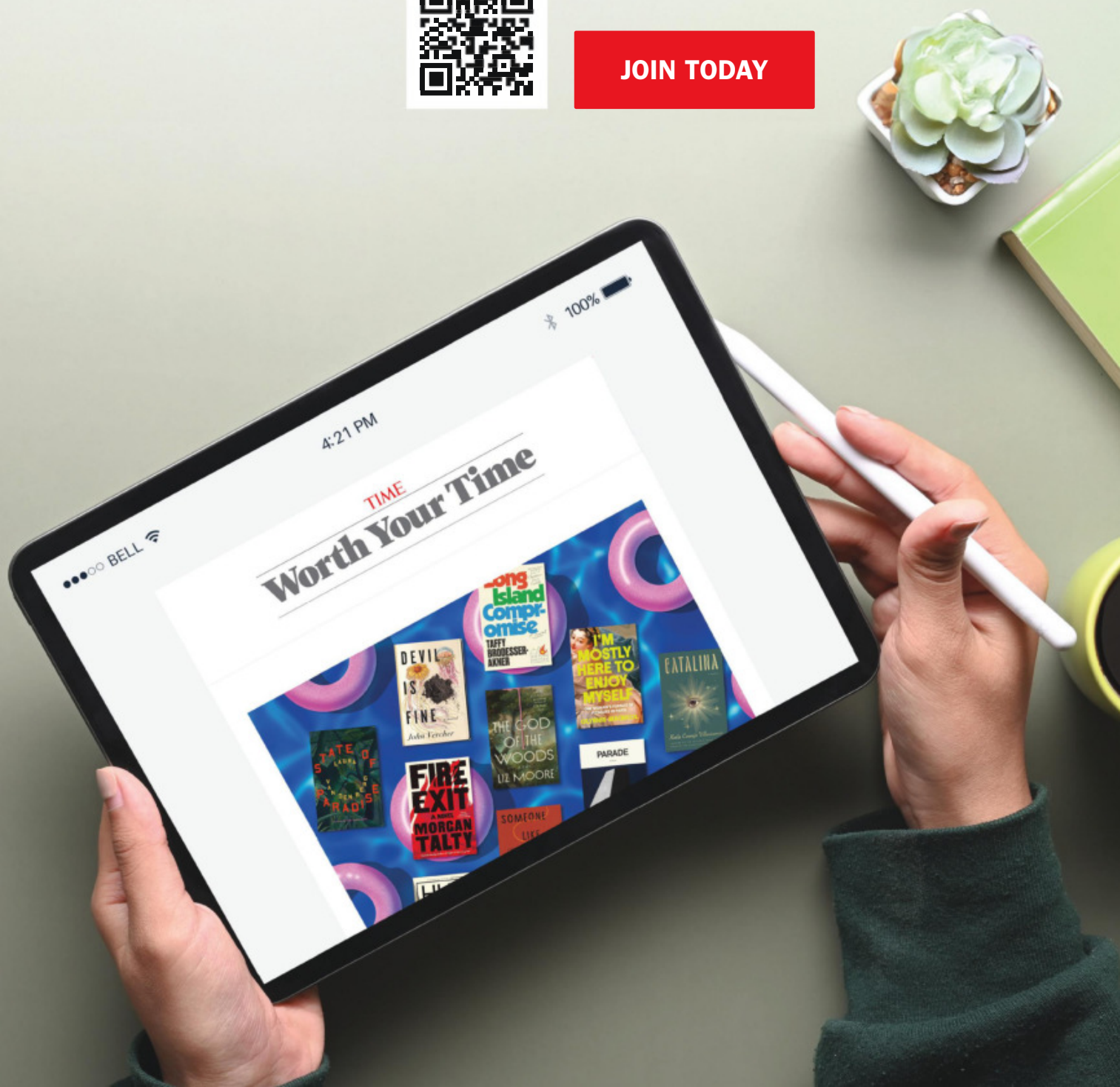


Going All In

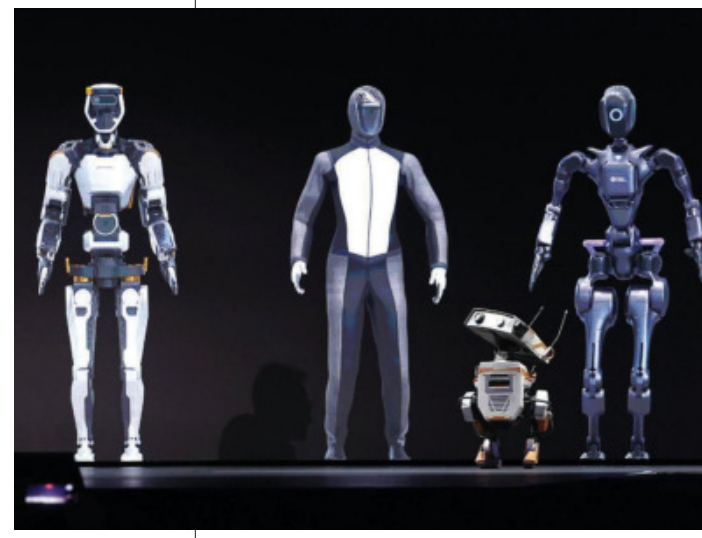
Tech companies raced ahead with AI, driving markets and stirring regulators

BY ANDREW R. CHOW

IN 2024, BOTH CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY and the companies controlling it grew increasingly powerful, provoking euphoric wonderment and existential dread. Companies like Nvidia and Alphabet soared in value, fueled by expectations that artificial intelligence (AI) will become a cornerstone of modern life. While those grand visions are still far into the future, tech undeniably shaped markets, warfare, elections, climate, and daily life this year.

Perhaps technology's biggest impact this year was on the global economy. The so-called Magnificent Seven—the stocks of Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla—thrived in large part because of the AI boom, propelling the S&P 500 to new highs. Nvidia, which designs the computer chips powering many AI systems, led the way, with its stock nearly tripling in price. These profits spurred an arms race in AI infrastructure, with companies constructing enormous factories and data centers—which in turn drew criticism from environmentalists about their energy consumption. Some market watchers also expressed concern about the increasing dependence of the global economy on a handful of companies, and the potential impacts if they prove unable to fulfill their massive promises. But as of early December, the value of these companies showed no sign of letting up.

Though not with the explosive novelty of ChatGPT's 2023 breakthrough, generative AI systems advanced over the past 12 months: Google's DeepMind achieved silver-medal results at a prestigious math competition; Google's NotebookLM impressed users with its ability to turn written notes into succinct podcasts; ChatGPT passed a Stanford-administered Turing test; Apple integrated new artificial intelligence tools into its newest iPhone. Beyond personal devices, AI played a pivotal role in forecasting hurricanes and powering growing fleets of driverless cars across China and San Francisco.



JUSTIN SULLIVAN—GETTY IMAGES

HUMANOID ROBOTS AT NVIDIA'S AI CONFERENCE IN MARCH

A MORE DANGEROUS SIDE of AI, however, also came into view. AI tools, created by companies like Palantir and Clearview, proved central to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza in their ability to identify foreign troops and targets to bomb. AI was integrated into drones, surveillance systems, and cybersecurity. Generative AI also infiltrated 2024's many elections. South Asian candidates flooded social media with AI-generated content. Russian state actors used deepfaked text, images, audio, and video to spread disinformation in the U.S. and amplify fears around immigration. After President-elect Donald Trump reposted an AI-generated image of Taylor Swift endorsing him on the campaign trail, the pop star responded with an Instagram post about her "fears around AI" and an endorsement of Vice President Kamala Harris instead.

Swift's fears were shared by many of her young fans, who are coming of age in a generation that seems to be bearing the brunt of technology's harms. This year, hand-wringing about the impact of social media on mental health came to a head with Jonathan Haidt's best seller *The Anxious Generation*, which drew a direct link between smartphones and a rise in teen depression. (Some scientists have disputed

this correlation.) Social media platforms scrambled to address the issue with their own fixes: Instagram, for instance, set new guardrails for teen users.

But many parents, lawmakers, and regulators argued that these platforms weren't doing enough on their own to protect children, and took action. New Mexico's attorney general sued Snap Inc., accusing Snapchat of facilitating child sexual exploitation through its algorithm. Dozens of states moved forward with a lawsuit against Meta, accusing it of inducing young children and teenagers into addictive social media use. In July, the U.S. Senate passed the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), which puts the onus on social media companies to prevent harm. Most tech companies are fighting the bill, which has yet to pass the House.

The potential harms around generative AI and children are mostly still unknown. But in February, a teenager died by suicide after becoming obsessed with a chatbot modeled after *Game of Thrones* character Daenerys Targaryen. (The company called the situation "tragic" and told the New York *Times* that it was adding safety features.) Regulators were also wary of the centralization that comes with tech, arguing that its concentration can lead to health crises, rampant misinformation, and vulnerable points of global failure. They point to the Crowdstrike outage—which grounded airplanes and shut down banks across the world—and the Ticketmaster breach, in which the data of over 500 million users was compromised.

President Joe Biden signed a bill requiring its Chinese owner to sell TikTok or be banned in the U.S. French authorities arrested Telegram CEO Pavel Durov, accusing him of refusing to cooperate in their efforts to stop the spread of child porn, drugs, and money laundering on the platform. Antitrust actions also increased worldwide. In the U.S., Biden officials embarked on several aggressive lawsuits to break up Google's and Apple's empires. A U.K. watchdog accused Google of wielding anticompetitive practices to dominate the online ad market. India also proposed an antitrust law, drawing fierce rebukes from tech lobbyists. But the tech industry may face less pressure next year, thanks in part to the effort of the world's richest man: Elon Musk, whose net worth ballooned by more than $100 billion over the past year. Musk weathered many battles on many frontiers. Tesla failed to deliver its long-awaited self-driving cars, agitating investors. X was briefly banned in Brazil after a judge accused the platform of allowing disinformation to flourish. In the U.S., watchdogs accused Musk of facilitating hate speech and disinformation on X, and of blatantly using a major public platform to put his finger on the scale for his preferred candidate, Donald Trump. Musk's companies face at least 20 investigations, from all corners of government.

BUT MUSK SCORED VICTORIES by launching and catching a SpaceX rocket and implanting the first Neuralink chip into a paralyzed patient's brain. And in the November election, his alliance with Trump paid off. Musk is now a prominent figure in Trump's transition team, and tipped to head up a new government agency that aims to slash government spending by $2 trillion. And while the owner of Tesla must navigate Trump's stated opposition to EVs, he is positioned to use his new perch to influence the future of AI. While Musk warns the public about AI's existential risk, he is also racing to build a more powerful chatbot than ChatGPT, which was built by his rival Sam Altman. Altman's OpenAI endured many criticisms over safety this year but nevertheless raised a massive $6.6 billion in October.

Regulators argue Big Tech is becoming too centralized and spreading misinformation

Is the growing power of tech titans like Musk and Altman good for the world? In 2024, they spent much of their time furiously building while criticizing regulators for standing in their way. Their creations, as well as those of other tech gurus, provided plenty of evidence both of the good that can arise from their projects, and the overwhelming risks and harms. ◻

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An Uphill Battle

It was a complicated year for climate action, with glimmers of hope amid halting progress

BY JUSTIN WORLAND

FACING OFF AGAINST A CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE IN JUNE

BY EARLY NOVEMBER, IT WAS VIRTUALLY certain that 2024 would be the hottest year on record. The evidence was being felt around the world—from flooding that killed hundreds in Spain to drought in 48 of America's 50 states. Insurance giants dropped coverage in danger zones and warned about the growing challenge posed by climate change. Amid all that, a casual observer might have expected negotiators gathered at U.N. climate talks in Baku, Azerbaijan, to double down on the most critical efforts to cut global emissions and prevent the problem from getting worse.

Instead, the talks, known this year as COP29, devolved into a chaotic conflict across decades-old battle lines. The deal that emerged—an agreement for developed countries to lead in providing $300 billion annually in climate finance to Global South nations—was enough to keep hope alive but far from sufficient to tackle the scale of the problem. Chandni Raina, a negotiator for at-risk India, summed up the prevailing sentiment after the finance agreement was gaveled in: "We are extremely hurt."

The talks were a fitting end to a complicated year of climate action. As the problem grows worse, leaders constrained by political considerations keep eking out piecemeal solutions. The solutions could be worse, but they could also be a lot better. In 2024, few politicians are denying the urgent science of climate change. Yet most are struggling to act on the scale necessary to help the world avoid the worst effects of warming.

But that doesn't mean all is lost. This year brought some glimmers of progress. The economics of clean energy have improved. Policies enacted years ago are paying dividends. And innovators—technological, financial, and policy—continue to forge ahead. In time, those developments will make a more sustainable future inevitable. The question is what the path looks like to get there.

ANY ASSESSMENT of the year in climate requires a clear-eyed look at the science. In November, the World Meteorological Organization warned not only that 2024 is on track to be the hottest on record, but also that global temperature rise may bob above the 1.5°C threshold laid out in the Paris Agreement. To avoid that, a U.N. Environment Program report said countries would need to cut emissions 42% by 2030 and 57% by 2035. It noted that hitting these numbers remains "technically" possible. But it would require muscular government programs to promote clean energy, stop carbon-releasing deforestation, and push high-polluting industries to decarbonize.

The current political context is not exactly friendly to such sweeping government programs. In the E.U., a longstanding climate leader, populist backlash this year gave right-wing, anticlimate

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policymakers a record presence in the European Parliament. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, head of the E.U.'s executive branch, remains in office, but her new cabinet will be playing defense. Top officials say they will focus on streamlining existing climate policies to make the bloc more competitive rather than issuing new ones. "There is a clear conviction that we will continue to lead on this," Wopke Hoekstra, the bloc's top climate official, told me in April. But the E.U. needs to "bridge that better, marry that better with competitiveness for our companies and a just transition for our people."

Nowhere, however, is the reality of challenging politics more stark than in the U.S., where Donald Trump won a nonconsecutive second term as President. He will enter the White House promising to end what he has called "the Green New Scam," as he describes the Biden Administration's clean-energy tax breaks and subsidies. Trump may not be able to repeal in its entirety the Inflation Reduction Act, President Joe Biden's landmark climate law, given the jobs the law has created in conservative places where voters support Trump. But his return nonetheless casts a pall on global climate efforts. Investors dumped green stocks in response to Trump's ascent. Leaders in the Global South have already felt less diplomatic pressure to decarbonize. And some companies have doubled down on their strategy of keeping quiet on climate efforts. "It's clear that the next Administration will try to take a U-turn and erase much of this progress," John Podesta, Biden's climate envoy, said on the first day of COP29. "I'm keenly aware of the disappointment that the United States has at times caused."

Combine the stark science with the stark political realities and you get a pretty grim picture: the uphill climate battle got a lot more difficult this year. Still, a careful observer can identify meaningful green shoots.

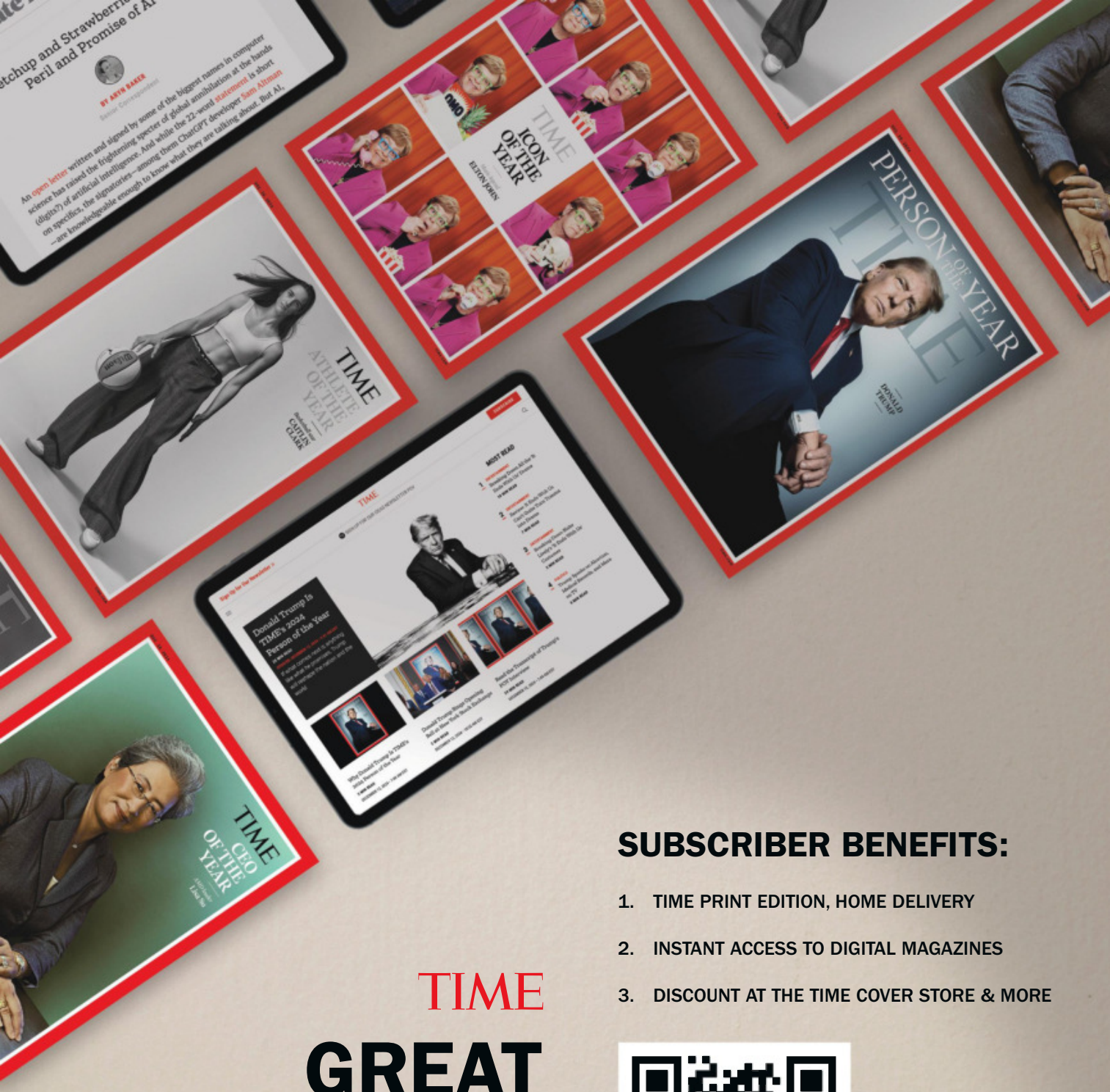
NO MATTER the political complications, countries continued to deploy clean energy at a rapid clip this year driven by economics (renewables are often cheaper than fossil fuels) and energy-security concerns (producing clean electricity at home means less reliance on polluting imports). Globally, investment in green technologies has reached nearly $2 trillion annually, twice the level of investment in new fossil-fuel supply, according to the International Energy Agency. Many climate advocates have celebrated the resurgence of nuclear power. Long considered taboo, and too expensive, investing in nuclear offers a zero-carbon solution to companies building energy-intensive AI data centers.

And there are the nascent initiatives launched in 2024 that will pay dividends in the months and years to come. Financial innovators have pursued new ways of investing in climate projects. That includes efforts on the global stage to use government money to "derisk" private-sector climate investments in the Global South. Thus far, these efforts have been relatively small, but their impact will grow as the programs scale. Policy innovators, too, are thinking through ways to continue progress in the new political atmosphere. Linking emissions reduction with trade, for example, offers a potential opportunity, even under Trump.

'I'm keenly aware of the disappointment that the United States has at times caused.'
—JOHN PODESTA, U.S. CLIMATE ENVOY

In climate conversations it has become almost cliché to say the energy transition is inevitable. And yet that's the truth.

Will it happen fast enough? Right now, things don't look good, but that doesn't mean we should give up. Every bit of warming we can avoid matters. In November, I spoke with World Bank President Ajay Banga about his agenda to remake the bank with climate in mind. More than any policy guidance, what struck me was his approach to making change by carefully tweaking the organization's structures. It's a lesson worth remembering as we head into 2025: in time, small changes add up to something much bigger. "Forecasts are not destiny," he says. "You can change destiny, but you have to work at it." ◻



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Mental Health Levels Up

2024's progress hints at things to come

BY ALICE PARK

YANA ISKAYEVA—GETTY IMAGES

PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING MENTAL health is notoriously slow and mostly incremental. Breakthrough treatments tend to be rare, and trained professionals too few to meet the demand for services, which is increasing. But 2024 was a pivotal year—thanks to the culmination of decades of research and post-pandemic attention to mental-health issues.

In March, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Rejoyn, the first digital therapeutic to treat major depressive disorder. The app opens the door to a new class of therapies that could dramatically increase access to treatment. Six months later, the FDA approved the first new drug for schizophrenia in 30 years, Cobenfy. It targets a different brain chemical system than previous treatments. And psychedelics notched a first when the FDA reviewed a request to approve MDMA for the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. Though this bid ultimately failed—the agency wanted to see more research—the FDA remains open to this group of drugs as a promising new way to treat certain mental-health conditions.

These advances come at a time when the need for mental-health services has never been more urgent. About a fifth of teens in the U.S. report symptoms of anxiety or depression, according to the most recently analyzed federal survey data from 2021–22, but 20% say they can't afford therapy to address their symptoms. The national lifeline for mental-health crises, 988, fielded around 5.3 million calls, texts or chats this year. And the U.S. surgeon general raised the alarm about two major mental-health issues: first calling for warning labels about the dangers of social media for young people, and then highlighting the extraordinary stress and anxiety parents experience in raising families today.

Clearly, more help is needed. "The problem is that there are so few trained personnel," says Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the school of public health at Brown University and former White House COVID-19 response coordinator. But innovations like those introduced this year can help to ease the load on mental-health professionals. The schizophrenia drug Cobenfy solves a number of problems that plague current treatments, which aren't very effective and come with such severe side effects that up to half of patients stop taking them—it targets a circuit in the brain that patients seem to tolerate better, and has been shown to reduce symptoms like hallucinations, paranoia, and delusions. That could help more people to get the treatment they need.

Rejoyn, which was approved as a supplement to existing treatments, lets people take their mental health into their own hands through a smartphone app. It prompts users to remember emotions depicted on people's faces, which requires them to use both the emotional and cognitive processing centers of their brain. In studies, people who used Rejoyn for six weeks showed more balanced activity in these brain centers and had fewer depression symptoms. That "rewiring" may make people more responsive to traditional treatments like cognitive behavior therapy or antidepressants.

These advances may have reached patients in 2024, but they didn't develop in

a year, or even a few. Each took decades of basic scientific research, trial and error, and careful testing in people. That's true not just of mental-health innovations, but with advances in all areas of medicine: 2024 also saw the first genetically edited pig-to-human kidney transplant, the first patients receiving CRISPR-edited gene therapy for sickle cell disease, the rise of the most powerful medications yet to treat obesity, and unprecedented remissions for the most challenging cancers. "I've been following life sciences for decades, and I have never seen acceleration at this level, and spread across so many different areas," says Dr. Eric Topol, founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute.

As the incoming Trump Administration threatens to reduce federal research budgets while shrinking health agencies in the name of efficiency, health experts fear such momentum could slow, ultimately narrowing the treatment pipeline for a number of diseases. The impact might not be felt immediately, but could result in fewer innovations in coming years. "The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is an agency that invests in long-term scientific progress," says Jha. "What I worry about is that if we are going to make a bunch of cuts to NIH, we might not see any negative health effects this year, but it will hurt the next generation more than it will hurt people today. Today's miracles come from fundamental investments that happened a decade or two decades ago."

'I have never seen acceleration at this level, and spread across so many different areas.'

—DR. ERIC TOPOL, SCRIPPS RESEARCH TRANSLATIONAL INSTITUTE

Philanthropists and the private sector could step in to help fill the funding gap. But that may mean the investments won't be as broad and diverse as government-driven funding, and might prioritize specific conditions, widening the already significant gaps in access to essential health services such as those for mental health.

STEVE CHRISTO—CORBIS/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

Even more disturbing than the immediate risk of potential cuts to research budgets is a deeper mistrust in science and scientists that is part of a larger "culture of hostility to expertise," says Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, vice provost for global initiatives at the University of Pennsylvania, who has served in both the Office of Management and Budget and the NIH. "Someone being an expert in an area used to get them a lot of authority, reverence, and respect. Now it's more than likely to get them real hostility, name-calling, and denigrating attacks. It's very distressing, because this is occurring simultaneously as we revel in all the fruits that science is producing."

Restoring trust in science is necessary to keep up the medical progress that improves lives this and every year. Such advances are critical in mental health, as rates of illness and demand for treatment continues to rise. Innovative developments, including novel treatments and new ways of thinking about how to incorporate digital technologies, are important first steps to increasing access and addressing unmet needs.

Those investments must continue, since in the U.S., "even though we have a lot of health problems, things are starting to get better," Jha says. "And the reason things are getting better is because of long-term investments into the NIH and the work of public health and biomedical scientists." ◻

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TIME
Person OF THE Year
2024

THE PRESIDENT-ELECT, PICTURED AT MAR-A-LAGO ON NOV. 25

Donald TRUMP

PHOTOGRAPH BY PLATON FOR TIME

The CH

A once and future President whose influence dominated this year

By Sam Jacobs

THREE DAYS BEFORE THANKSGIVING, THE former and future President of the United States is sitting in the sun-filled dining room of his Florida home and private club. In the lavish reception area, more than a dozen people have been waiting for nearly two hours for Donald Trump to emerge. His picks for National Security Adviser, special envoy to the Middle East, Vice President, and chief of staff huddle nearby. All afternoon, Trump pipes music throughout the 1927 oceanfront estate from a 2,000-song playlist he curates: Sinéad O'Connor's "Nothing Compares 2 U," ABBA's "The Winner Takes It All," James Brown's "It's a Man's Man's Man's World."

For 97 years, the editors of TIME have been picking the Person of the Year: the individual who, for better or for worse, did the most to shape the world and the headlines over the past 12 months. In many years, that choice is a difficult one. In 2024, it was not.

Since he began running for President in 2015, perhaps no single individual has played a larger role in changing the course of politics and history than Trump. He shocked many by winning the White House in 2016, then led the U.S. through a chaotic term that included the first year of a pandemic as well as a period of nationwide protest, and that ended with his losing the election by 7 million votes and provoking the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. The smart money wagered that we had witnessed the end of Trump.

IF THAT MOMENT marked Trump's nadir, today we are witnessing his apotheosis. On the cusp of his second presidency, all of us—from his most fanatical supporters to his most fervent critics—are living in the Age of Trump. He dispatched his Republican rivals in near record time. For weeks, he campaigned largely from the New York courtroom where he would be convicted on 34 felony counts. His sole debate with President Joe Biden in June led to his opponent's eventual exit from the race. Sixteen days later, he survived an assassination attempt at a campaign rally. In the sprint that followed, he outlasted Vice President Kamala Harris, sweeping all seven swing states and emerging from the election at the height of his popularity. "Look what happened," Trump told his supporters in his election-night victory speech. "Isn't this crazy?" He almost couldn't believe it himself.

Trump has remade American politics in the process. He won by enlarging his base, seizing the frustration over rising prices and benefiting from a global turn against incumbents. With those tailwinds, exit polls suggest that he won the largest percentage of Black Americans for a Republican since Gerald Ford and the most Latino voters of any GOP nominee since George W. Bush. Suburban women,

OICE

whose anger over restrictions to reproductive rights was thought to be a bulwark for the Democrats, moved not away but toward him. He became the first Republican in 20 years to win more votes than the Democrat, with 9 of 10 American counties increasing their support for Trump from 2020.

Now we watch as members of Congress, international institutions, and global leaders once again align themselves with his whims. The carousel of Trumpworld characters spins anew. This time, we think we know what to expect. Supporters cheer even his promises to take revenge on his enemies and dismantle the government. In a matter of weeks, Trump will be returning to the Oval Office with his intentions clear: tariff imports, deport millions, and threaten the press. Put RFK Jr. in charge of vaccines. Chance war with Iran. "Anything can happen," he told us.

SITTING WITH *TIME* three weeks after the election, Trump was more subdued than when we visited him at Mar-a-Lago in March. He is happiest to be in a fight, and now that he has won, he sounded almost wistful, recognizing that he had run for office for the final time. "It's sad in a way. It will never happen again," Trump told us. And while he is thinking about how that chapter has ended, for Americans and for the world, it is also the beginning of a new one. Trump is once again at the center of the world, and in as strong a position as he has ever been.

Over time, we've seen the Person of the Year franchise shift: from Man of the Year to its current designation; from the period between the world wars, defined by leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Wallis Simpson, to the first quarter of the 21st century, an era marked by the tremendous changes ushered in by a technological revolution. Although the American presidency has evolved across these eras, its influence has not diminished. Today, we are witnessing a resurgence of populism, a widening mistrust in the institutions that defined the last century, and an eroding faith that liberal values will lead to better lives for most people. Trump is both agent and beneficiary of it all.

In a matter of weeks, Trump will be returning to the Oval Office with his intentions clear

For marshaling a comeback of historic proportions, for driving a once-in-a-generation political realignment, for reshaping the American presidency and altering America's role in the world, Donald Trump is TIME's 2024 Person of the Year.

Mar-a-Lago was quiet three days before Thanksgiving. Donald Trump's Moorish palace seemed all but deserted late that morning, the seaside estate's cavernous living room traversed intermittently by a junior staffer or silent aide. Totems to Trump were displayed everywhere.

BY ERIC CORTELLESSA/ PALM BEACH, FLA.

Framed magazines with him on the cover hung by the front door. On a table near the fireplace sat a cast-bronze eagle awarded him by the singer Lee Greenwood. In the men's lavatory, a picture of him with Arnold Palmer hung near the urinals. Adorning a wall in the library bar, a painting titled *The Visionary* depicted Trump in a tennis sweater, trim and youthful. The empty rooms felt less like a millionaire members' club than a museum.

By midafternoon, the President-elect's imminent arrival had stirred signs of life. Discreetly placed speakers offered up selections from Trump's personally curated 2,000-song playlist. A handful of transition honchos and soon-to-be Administration officials arrived, perching on overstuffed sofas and huddling in corners. Incoming chief of staff Susie Wiles conferred with Trump's designated National Security Adviser, Mike Waltz. Vice President–elect J.D. Vance strode in with a retinue of staffers. An aide posted up near a window overlooking the patio, setting down Trump's personal cell phone, which lit up occasionally with calls and texts from favored media personalities and Cabinet picks. You could sense Trump before you could see him, the small group of senior aides rising to their feet in anticipation.

The world's most powerful man entered with an air of unhurried bonhomie. Dressed in his trademark navy suit and red tie, Trump, 78, appeared a little older than he had some seven months earlier, when he last met with TIME—more subdued, less verbose, the same discursive speech patterns but with the volume turned down. Sitting under bright lights for a 30-minute photo session ahead of a 65-minute interview, he's asked to explain the bruising on his right hand. "It's from shaking hands with thousands of people," he says.

JIM WATSON—AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Trump's political rebirth is unparalleled in American history. His first term ended in disgrace, with his attempts to overturn the 2020 election results culminating in the attack on the U.S. Capitol. He was shunned by most party officials when he announced his candidacy in late 2022 amid multiple criminal investigations. Little more than a year later, Trump cleared the Republican field, clinching one of the fastest contested presidential primaries in history. He spent six weeks during the general election in a New York City courtroom, the first former President to be convicted of a crime—a fact that did little to dampen his support. An assassin's bullet missed his skull

TRUMP TAKES THE STAGE AT THE GOP CONVENTION IN MILWAUKEE ON JULY 18

by less than an inch at a rally in Butler, Pa., in July. Over the next four months, he beat not one but two Democratic opponents, swept all seven swing states, and became the first Republican to win the popular vote in 20 years. He has realigned American politics, remaking the GOP and leaving Democrats reckoning with what went awry.

Trump has a ready explanation for his improbable resurrection. He even has a name for its climactic final act. "I called it 72 Days of Fury," he says as the interview gets under way. "We hit the nerve of the country. The country was angry." It wasn't just the MAGA faithful. Trump harnessed deep national discontent about the economy, immigration, and cultural issues. His grievances resonated with suburban moms and retirees, Latino and Black men, young voters and tech edgelords. While Democrats estimated that most of the country wanted a President who would uphold the norms of liberal democracy, Trump saw a nation ready to smash them, tapping into a growing sense that the system was rigged.

If America was craving change, it is about to see how much Trump can deliver. He ran on a strongman vision, proposing to deport migrants by the millions, dismantle parts of the federal government, seek revenge against his political adversaries, and dismantle institutions that millions of people see as censorious and corrupt. "He understands the cultural zeitgeists," says his 2016 campaign manager Kellyanne Conway, who remains a close adviser. "Donald Trump is a complicated person with simple ideas, and way too many politicians are the exact opposite."

Trump also promises to attack the sources abroad that he blames for the country's malaise: economic interdependence, transnational criminals, traditional allies he sees as

free riders on America's long-running global beneficence. He believes he has tools to fight back: punitive tariffs, bare-knuckle negotiations, and threats to withdraw U.S. military, humanitarian, and economic support. Willing to upend the nation's postwar role as a bulwark against authoritarianism, he promises to usher in a foreign policy rooted in "America First" transactionalism.

Much still stands in his way. The Republicans have narrow majorities in the House and Senate. A conservative Supreme Court may not bless all his boundary-pushing policies. Enduring institutional resistance inside the federal bureaucracy could thwart his designs. The public also remains a powerful check on any President. Trump has proved twice now that he can surf to power on anti-incumbent sentiment, a cult of personality, and divisive rhetoric, including racist and xenophobic attacks. He has yet to prove that he can enact the radical vision he campaigned on. Those closest to the President-elect say that he will surprise people by fulfilling his promises. "Most politicians don't," says Wiles, "and he will."

Whether Trump can actually fix the root causes of Americans' anger is another question. He will now have to contend with the same forces he rode to the White House—a globalized economy, mass migration, the rise of China—that have bedeviled predecessors from both parties and ousted incumbents around the world. He will also see just how far the nation is willing to let him go. If he succeeds, he could reshape the country. Along the way, he risks tearing down the constitutional norms and institutions that have seen America's great experiment in democracy through 2½ centuries.

'There are not enough MAGA people to actually win an election. So who do you go get?'

—TRUMP CAMPAIGN OFFICIAL

TRUMP WAS IN THE PRIVATE CABIN of his plane, flying to an April 2 campaign rally in Grand Rapids, Mich., when he picked up a document Wiles had placed atop a stack of papers. The heading was not subtle: HOW A NATIONAL ABORTION BAN WILL COST TRUMP THE ELECTION. Trump raised his eyebrows. "Kind of a nasty title, huh?" he said.

The episode was a turning point for an issue central to the race: whether Trump could find a position on abortion that would limit his electoral losses with women after playing a pivotal role in the fall of *Roe v. Wade*. That in turn was part of Trump's larger challenge: how to offer change to everyone who wanted it, including voters put off by his positions or behavior. "There are not enough MAGA people to actually win an election," a Trump campaign official tells TIME. "So who do you go get? How do you broaden that?"

Before he considered the memo, Trump had been on the verge of supporting a 16-week federal abortion ban. Conway had showed him polling that indicated barring the procedure after 16 weeks of pregnancy was more popular than doing so after 24. But Trump's speechwriter and policy adviser, Vince Haley, had raised an objection on a late-March conference call, according to three people present: "Does he know that the 16-week ban will be stricter than existing law in a lot of the states?" There was a silence. "Probably not," said Trump's political director James Blair, who set to assembling a slide deck that argued such a ban would hurt Trump in the key states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, all of which offered women the opportunity to obtain the

JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON—AP

TRUMP BACKERS, SEEN FROM HARRIS' CAMPAIGN BUS, NEAR PITTSBURGH ON AUG. 18

procedure until at least 20 weeks of pregnancy.

After flipping through Blair's presentation on the plane, Trump perked his head up: "So we leave it to the states, right?" Advisers agreed. "Great," Trump said. "We'll do a video." Within a few minutes, he was dictating his remarks to Haley. A few days later, Trump released the clip on his social media platform. For the rest of the race, a politician who had once asserted that "there has to be some form of punishment" for women who undergo abortions stuck to his stance of treating it as a states'-rights issue.

The same month, Trump made another fateful decision: to end his crusade against vote by mail and early voting. For more than a year, senior advisers urged him to embrace a practice Trump had baselessly maligned as rife with fraud since the 2020 election. Several of his top lieutenants, including Wiles and Blair, were Florida operatives trained in the science of banking early votes. Wiles wrote Trump a memo showing the data on how spurning mail ballots cost Republicans in a series of razor-thin races in 2022. It would be self-defeating to oppose the practice, argued Wiles and Trump's daughter-in-law Lara, whom he had handpicked as co-chair of the Republican National Committee (RNC).

Trump listened, but it took a visit from Rob Gleason, a former chair of the Pennsylvania Republican Party, to frame the matter in terms that made him agree. "Sir, your people are so excited to vote for you that they want to as soon as they can," Gleason told him during an April meeting at Mar-a-Lago, according to two Trump officials familiar with the conversation. "They don't want to wait. But you gotta tell them it's OK. You gotta give them permission." From then on, Trump promoted absentee and early voting, and directed the RNC to launch a mobilization drive targeting mail voters.

By the summer, Trump had the confidence of a man holding history in his hands. In late June, Joe Biden's weak debate performance spurred an open revolt among panicking Democrats. On July 13, Trump survived the assassination attempt, prompting an outpouring of support and sympathy. To many Americans, his defiance in the aftermath of the shooting—rising bloodied, fist in the air, chanting "Fight!"—made him an inspirational figure for the first time. "A lot of people changed with that moment," Trump tells TIME, sipping Diet Coke from a glass at Mar-a-Lago.

Trump's strengthening position prompted Biden to drop out of the race and endorse Vice President Kamala Harris. Within a matter of days, Harris consolidated support, raised hundreds of millions of dollars, and galvanized a moribund Democratic base. In the wake of a successful Democratic National Convention, Trump's inner circle experienced a creeping sense that he could lose. It was the moment of "maximal worry," says Vance. "There was this sense of, Is this honeymoon with Kamala Harris going to last all the way until the election?"

Trump is a devotee of the Don Draper maxim: If you don't like what's being said, change the conversation. And so his team did. Trump's son Don Jr. had long cultivated a rapport with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., whose independent campaign for the presidency in 2024 had garnered surprising levels of support, especially among disillusioned young men. Don Jr. worried Kennedy's candidacy risked siphoning key votes, and he began clandestine negotiations as the conversations progressed. Trump Jr. and Wiles began coordinating with Kennedy's campaign manager, his daughter-in-law Amaryllis Fox Kennedy, about removing him from the ballot in swing states and endorsing Trump. As Vance tells it, the pitch was simple: "You're not going to win. You're not going to have any effect on this race other than taking votes away from Donald Trump.

So why don't you actually join the team, set differences to the side, and focus on the big things that we care about?"

Once Kennedy bought into the plan, Wiles advised waiting to announce it until after the Democratic convention, believing it would stall Harris' momentum. To Wiles, the endorsement was one of the campaign's key moments. It neutralized the threat that Kennedy would peel off votes from Trump. But more importantly, "he allowed us to broaden the base of the party," she says. "He was a key way to do that."

Other new voters were devotees of Elon Musk, who endorsed Trump after the attack in Butler. Musk ended up pouring more than $250 million into supporting him, turning X into a de facto campaign organ, and serving as a key validator with the tech execs and corporate chieftains who had shied away from Trump for much of his time in the political arena. Now Musk will be among the array of billionaires with direct access to the Oval Office, creating a web of competing conflicts of interest.

To boost the contrast, the campaign maneuvered to portray Harris as too left-wing. It called attention to a questionnaire Harris filled out for the ACLU in 2019, during her last run for President, in which she supported taxpayer-funded sex-change operations for undocumented migrants held in detention. Trump's adviser Taylor Budowich and admaker Pat McCarthy drummed up a line that would define his most influential campaign advertisement: "Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you." The Trump campaign spent nearly $20 million to air the ad some 55,000 times in the first half of October, making it a key part of its closing message.

Strategists from both parties are divided over whether the Trump team's blueprint made the difference in a close race, or if Harris' headwinds—from pandemic-induced inflation to broad disquiet over Biden's age—were just too much to overcome in a truncated campaign against the world's most famous person. "We were up against a caricature of being dangerously liberal," Harris campaign chief Jen O'Malley Dillon said at a Harvard Institute of Politics conference Dec. 6. The Vice President's unwillingness to distance herself from her unpopular boss may have made as much of a difference as anything Trump did right. "It was a big looming negative hanging over us the whole time," said Harris deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks.

On election night, Trump campaign staff set up a war room in Trump's office at Mar-a-Lago, poring over incoming returns as the candidate schmoozed in the club's ballroom with Musk and UFC chief Dana White. After North Carolina and Georgia shifted into his column, Trump peeked in. "Anything concerning you?" he asked.

"Nope," an aide replied. "Feel good."

"Good," Trump said. When he returned to the ballroom, the jubilant crowd was dancing to "YMCA" by the Village People—a Trump rally staple that has become a cultural touchpoint, with everyone from professional athletes to TikTok aficionados mimicking his signature moves. Trump stood for a moment, taking it all in, before turning to an aide and asking when they should head to the nearby convention center where he would give his victory speech.

TRUMP CAMPAIGN AIDES ARRIVE IN FAYETTEVILLE, N.C., AHEAD OF AN OCT. 4 RALLY

EVAN VUCCI—AP

THE ELECTION GAVE TRUMP political capital to address the sources of American discontent at home and abroad. The question now is how he intends to spend it. By his own account, Trump will push the limits of presidential power and the law.

One of the first official acts of his presidency, Trump tells TIME, will be to pardon most of the rioters accused or convicted of storming the Capitol to block the certification of Biden's victory. "It's going to start in the first hour," he says. "Maybe the first nine minutes." Trump also plans early actions to

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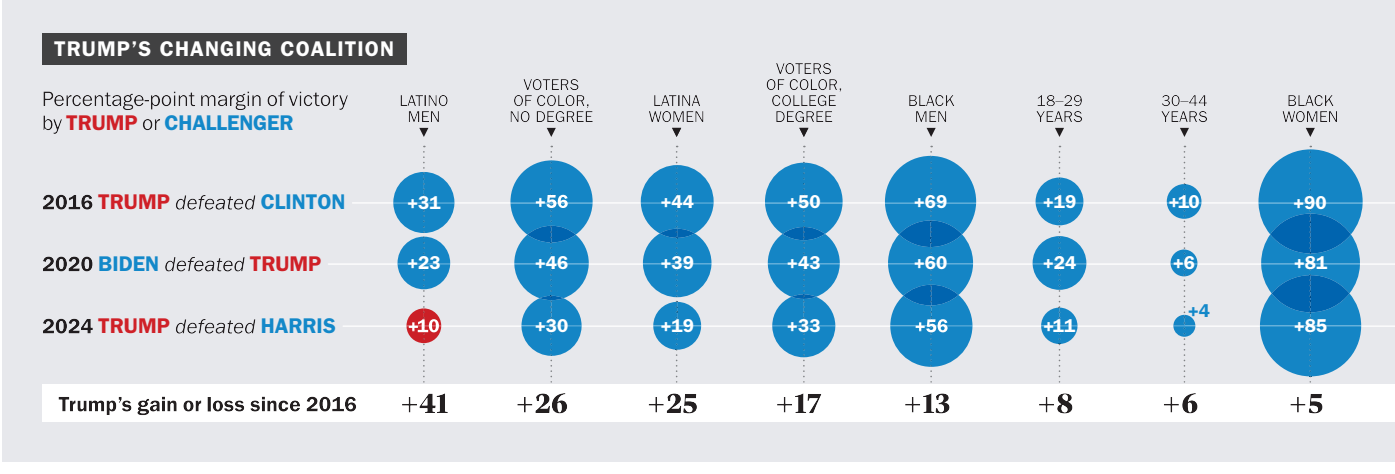
reverse many of Biden's Executive Orders and expand the drilling of oil on federal land.

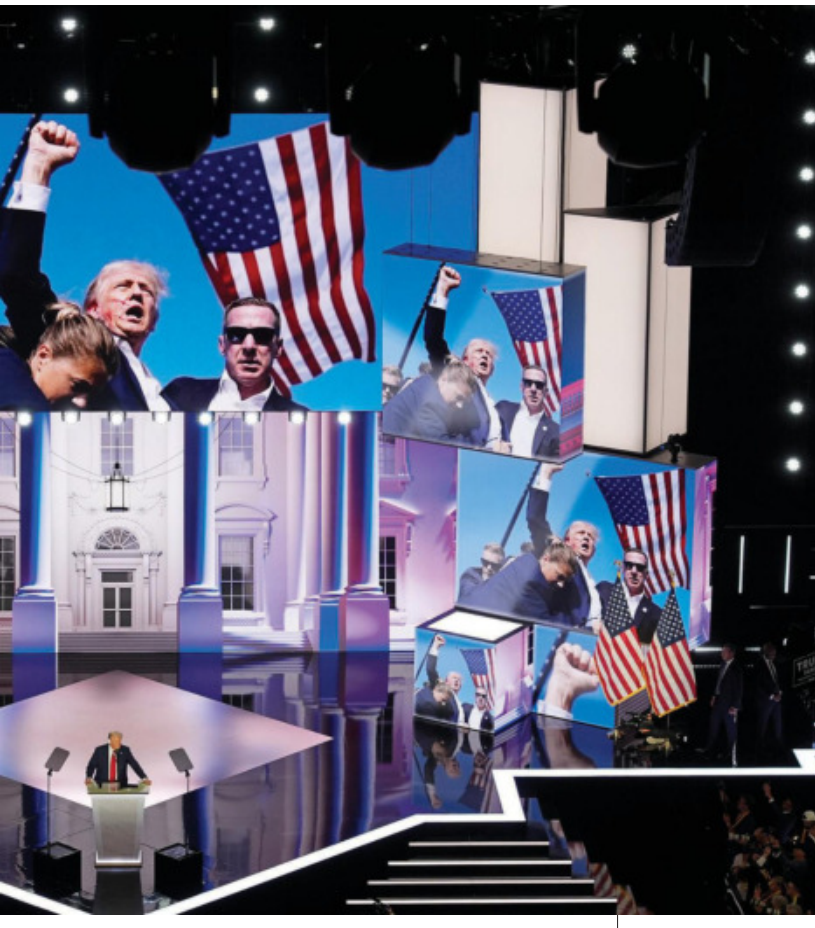
Trump's most aggressive moves will be on immigration enforcement. He vows to tighten the U.S. border with Mexico through a slew of Executive Orders, and aides say he would end the U.S. "catch-and-release" program and resume construction of a border wall. At the same time, he says, he will order U.S. law-enforcement agencies—and potentially the military—to embark on a massive deportation operation designed to remove more than 11 million undocumented migrants from the country. While the Posse Comitatus Act forbids the deployment of the military against civilians, Trump says he is willing to enlist the military to round up and deport migrants. "It doesn't stop the military if it's an invasion of our country," he says. Pressed on how he would respond if the military refuses to carry out those orders, Trump says, "I'll only do what the law allows, but I will go up to the maximum level of what the law allows."

Trump tells TIME he doesn't plan to restore the policy of separating children from their families to deter border crossings. But he doesn't rule it out, either. "I don't believe we'll have to, because we will send the whole family back," he says. "I would much rather deport them together." Trump's incoming border czar, Tom Homan, says "there is no deliberate policy being worked on to separate families." But he also leaves open the possibility of children again being ripped from their parents. "You can't say zero, it's not going to happen," Homan says.

DURING HIS SPEECH AT THE RNC, TRUMP DISCUSSES THE ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE IN BUTLER, PA.

For a mass-deportation operation of this scale, Trump's advisers are planning to build more detention centers to hold migrants until they can be deported to their home countries, a process that can take weeks, months, or even years to negotiate with receiving governments. It's not clear if all will be willing to take the migrants back. "We just don't arrest an alien and remove them on the same





MORRY GASH—AP

day," says Homan. "We're going to need beds." Trump says he will use access to the U.S. market as leverage to force foreign governments to cooperate. "I'll get them into every country," Trump says, "or we won't do business with those countries."

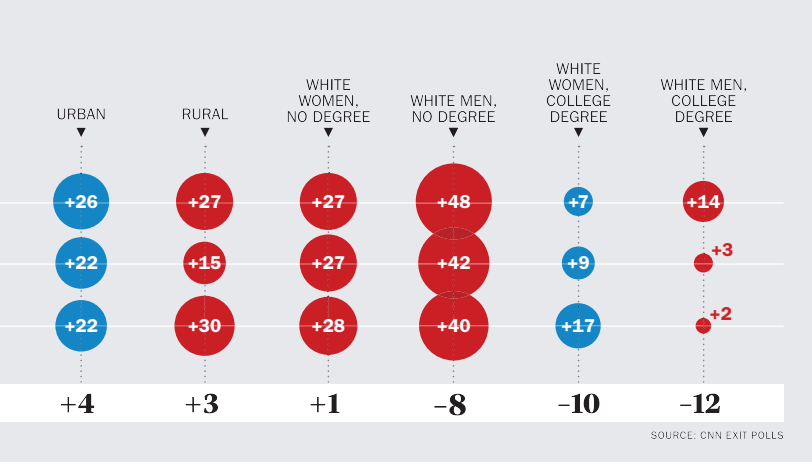
The operation would come at a steep cost. The nonprofit American Immigration Council estimates the tally for Trump's mass-deportation plans could be upwards of $300 billion. Trump is likely to seek funding from Congress, according to aides. "It's going to be expensive," Homan says.

American taxpayers could bear the brunt in other ways. Economists say deporting many of the low-wage workers who bolster multiple industries could lead to higher prices. "If you eliminate the jobs of the people who are working on building houses, those who are also doing the accounting and the supervising and the personnel and running the company—those kinds of jobs disappear also," says Douglas Rivlin of America's Voice, a progressive group that supports immigration reform. "It's a self-inflicted disaster." That's before factoring in the social and psychological costs to watching friends and neighbors rounded up and removed from their communities. "When you see the nightly news and there's a raid at Joe's Pizza," adds Hiroshi Motomura, an immigration scholar at UCLA, "that becomes very real."

Just how radical Trump can be depends in part on the buy-in of the Justice Department, which is set to be led by former Florida attorney general Pam Bondi, one of the defense attorneys on his first impeachment. Trump has vowed to seek retribution against his political enemies—saying the likes of Biden, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, special counsel Jack Smith, and others would face investigation and potential prosecution. Trump was coy in his interview with TIME about whether his DOJ will target his domestic political adversaries, saying only that the decision will be left to Bondi if she's confirmed. "That's up to her," he says. Either way, his victory spells the end of federal prosecutions that charged him with crimes ranging from election subversion to willfully retaining classified documents. (Trump denied the allegations.)

To dismantle the federal bureaucracy, Trump has enlisted Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy to head a commission, dubbed DOGE, aimed at slashing the size of government. Musk and Ramaswamy have touted massive layoffs to the federal workforce, especially civil servants, and cuts to regulations on everything from the water we drink to the air we breathe. They promise to finish the job in time for the 250th anniversary of American independence, July 4, 2026.

Experts in government administration say the commission risks degrading the



SOURCE: CNN EXIT POLLS

state's ability to function. "It's going to be harmful to the government's capacity to carry out the missions that Congress has assigned by statute," like administering Social Security and Medicare, says Peter Shane, a New York University law professor. If the Musk-Ramaswamy commission eliminates large numbers of civil servants, the government will likely have to rely on private companies instead. "There's no guarantee," says Shane, "that the contractors are going to be either cheaper or more competent."

On the campaign trail, Trump said he would not order the DOJ to enforce the Comstock Act, a 19th century law that prohibits the mailing of abortion pills. When he spoke with TIME before Thanksgiving, Trump's position on women's reproductive rights changed in the span of a few sentences. First he left open the possibility that the Food and Drug Administration could reverse approvals for medication abortion, then said it was "highly unlikely," before declaring, "We're going to take a look at all of that." Asked to clarify whether he was committed to preventing the FDA from stripping access to abortion pills, Trump replied, "It's always been my commitment."

TRUMP AT A SECTION OF THE BORDER WALL IN SIERRA VISTA, ARIZ., ON AUG. 22

While Trump's GOP will have majorities in the House and Senate, he has telegraphed few major legislative pushes beyond extending his first-term tax cuts and funding an immigration crackdown. Trump says he supports preserving the filibuster, which allows a minority in the Senate to block legislation. If that prevents the passage of bills through Congress, he says he will use executive action. "If I have even a little bit of trouble," he says, "I go to an Executive Order because I can get it done."

It was a glimpse of how Trump's expansive view of executive power will shape his second term, when he meets with inevitable obstacles. "The idea of the imperial presidency is not new, but he's taking it further than anyone," says presidential historian Julian Zelizer of Princeton University. "He doesn't care about the kind of restraints that still guided even Richard Nixon. None of that matters to him. So the potential is for an extraordinarily aggressive use of presidential power."

For all the focus on Trump's domestic agenda, much of the activity when TIME visited Mar-a-Lago was on foreign affairs. Waltz, the incoming National Security Adviser, ducked in and out of meetings, speaking with Vance and Steve Witkoff, the incoming special envoy to the Middle East. A source present in the national-security meetings says the goal was to ensure that America's adversaries—and allies—were not tempted to take advantage of the handoff between administrations.

MANY OF TRUMP'S ANSWERS to the nation's problems, including his immigration and trade policies, rely on successful diplomacy. "America First" may be both a campaign slogan and a governing North Star, but ending forever wars and boosting U.S. economic advantage requires working with others.

Trump's plans threaten to upend relationships with allies and traditional trading partners by imposing a blanket tariff on all imports. Already, he has floated 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada, a move that most economists predict will cause prices to rise. And he plans to increase tariffs on Chinese imports, aiming to coerce manufacturers to make their products in the U.S.

On the campaign trail, Trump liked to brag about brokering a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine in 24 hours. In person, he acknowledged this is trickier than he let on. "The Middle East is an easier problem to handle than what's happening with Russia and Ukraine," he says. "The numbers of dead young soldiers lying on fields all over the place are staggering. It's crazy what's taking place." Trump criticized Kyiv for launching U.S.-made missiles into Russian territory last month. "I disagree very vehemently with sending

DOUG MILLS—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

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missiles hundreds of miles into Russia. Why are we doing that?" he says. "We're just escalating this war and making it worse." When pressed on whether or not he would abandon Ukraine, Trump says he would use U.S. support for Ukraine as leverage against Russia in negotiating an end to the war. "I want to reach an agreement," he says, "and the only way you're going to reach an agreement is not to abandon."

In phone calls during the campaign, Trump told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to wind down the war in Gaza by the time of his Inauguration, a timeline that now looks highly unlikely. In Israel and the U.S., many suspect Netanyahu is prolonging the fighting to prevent snap elections that could result in his ouster. "He knows I want it to end," Trump tells TIME. When asked whether he trusts Netanyahu going into a second term, Trump takes a second before answering, "I don't trust anybody."

'Anything can happen.'

—TRUMP, ON THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR WITH IRAN

Trump also wants to expand the Abraham Accords he brokered between Israel and several Arab states to include Saudi Arabia. But he's less specific on a resolution between Israel and the Palestinians. In his first term he put forth the most comprehensive plan for a two-state solution since President Bill Clinton and prevented Netanyahu from extending Israeli sovereignty over roughly 30% of the West Bank. But on Nov. 12, he nominated as incoming U.S. ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, a zealous supporter of the settlement movement who advocates for Israel's annexing the West Bank.

The sudden collapse of Assad's rule in Syria on Dec. 8 adds another layer of complexity to the Middle East. It brings to power a rebel group once affiliated with al-Qaeda, but also marks yet another setback for an Iran regime already weakened in Lebanon and Gaza. Some analysts fear the losses may make Iran more likely to push for a nuclear weapon. Since Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, Tehran has edged ever closer to acquiring a nuclear weapon. As of April, the International Atomic Energy Agency estimated that Tehran has enough weapons-grade uranium to build a bomb in a matter of weeks. Iran and its proxies have waged a multifront war against Israel and have targeted U.S. assets in the region. During the presidential campaign, the Iranians plotted to assassinate Trump, according to federal charges brought in November by the Department of Justice. While the President-elect prides himself on not entering into any new wars in his first term, he leaves open the possibility that one may be necessary in a second. Asked about the chances of war with Iran, Trump pauses, then replies, "Anything can happen."

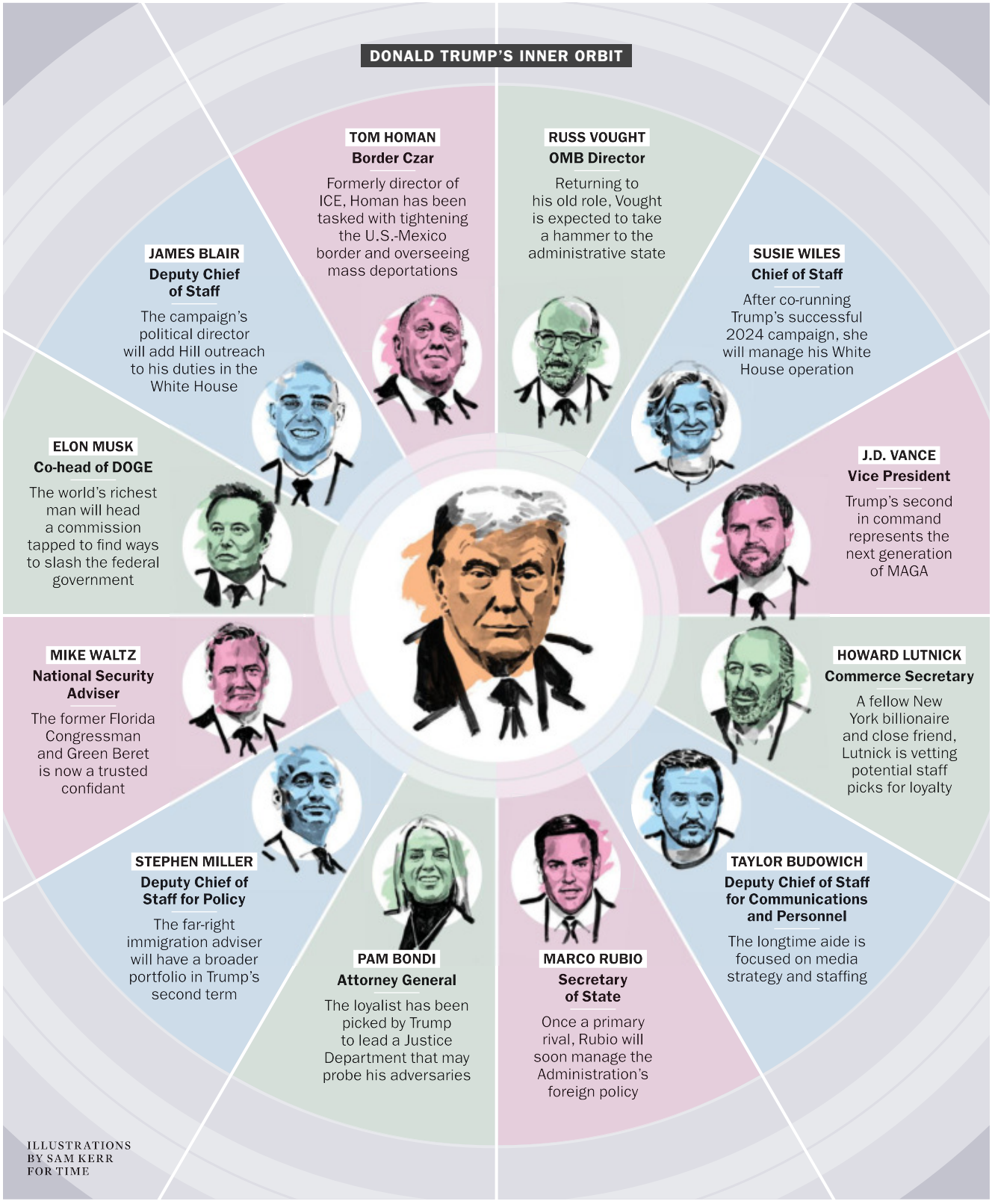
By the time the dinner hour is approaching, the crowd has swelled in the ornate reception area at Mar-a-Lago, transforming it into a buzzing king's court. Job seekers camp out on sofas, waiting to buttonhole Howard Lutnick, the Wall Street executive who co-chairs his transition. Lutnick, who is also Trump's chosen Commerce Secretary, has been tasked by Trump with vetting Cabinet appointees for the trait Trump values most: loyalty.

Trump has selected unconventional nominees who have demonstrated fealty to him and his agenda: former Fox News host Pete Hegseth for Defense Secretary; Tulsi Gabbard to become the Director of National Intelligence; and Kash Patel as his FBI director. He rewarded Kennedy by nominating him to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, and chose a pro-union Labor Secretary in a nod to working-class voters while also installing billionaires in top positions to appease the donors who like Trump's tax cuts and deregulation. The Cabinet taking shape reflects the fragmented coalition that powered him to victory, with Trump diehards mingling with mainstream choices like Senator Marco Rubio for Secretary of State and financier Scott Bessent at the Treasury Department.

As Trump gears up for his war on Washington, Washington's institutions are carefully pushing back. Republican Senators forced Trump to abandon his first choice to run the Justice Department, the far-right former Congressman Matt Gaetz of Florida, recoiling at his bombastic style and allegations that he had sex with a 17-year-old girl. (Gaetz denies this.) When it became clear the votes weren't there, Trump told Gaetz, "Matt, I don't think this is worth the fight," he tells TIME. In a matter of hours, he announced Bondi, another loyalist, as a replacement.

SOURCE PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES: TRUMP: SAUL LOEB—AFP; BONDI: ANDREW HARNIK; MUSK: ANDREW HARNIK; VOUGHT: STEFANI REYNOLDS—BLOOMBERG; LUTNICK: CHRISTOPHER GOODNEY—BLOOMBERG; HOMAN: BILL CLARK—CQ-ROLL CALL INC.; RUBIO: CHIP SOMODEVILLA; WALTZ: JOHN NACION; VANCE: ANDREW HARNIK; WILES: JABIN BOTSFORD—THE WASHINGTON POST; MILLER: TOM WILLIAMS—CQ-ROLL CALL INC.; BLAIR: BUDOWICH; TWITTER

DONALD TRUMP'S INNER ORBIT



TOM HOMAN
Border Czar
Formerly director of ICE, Homan has been tasked with tightening the U.S.-Mexico border and overseeing mass deportations

RUSS VOUGHT
OMB Director
Returning to his old role, Vought is expected to take a hammer to the administrative state

JAMES BLAIR
Deputy Chief of Staff
The campaign's political director will add Hill outreach to his duties in the White House

SUSIE WILES
Chief of Staff
After co-running Trump's successful 2024 campaign, she will manage his White House operation

ELON MUSK
Co-head of DOGE
The world's richest man will head a commission tapped to find ways to slash the federal government

J.D. VANCE
Vice President
Trump's second in command represents the next generation of MAGA

MIKE WALTZ
National Security Adviser
The former Florida Congressman and Green Beret is now a trusted confidant

HOWARD LUTNICK
Commerce Secretary
A fellow New York billionaire and close friend, Lutnick is vetting potential staff picks for loyalty

STEPHEN MILLER
Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy
The far-right immigration adviser will have a broader portfolio in Trump's second term

PAM BONDI
Attorney General
The loyalist has been picked by Trump to lead a Justice Department that may probe his adversaries

MARCO RUBIO
Secretary of State
Once a primary rival, Rubio will soon manage the Administration's foreign policy

TAYLOR BUDOWICH
Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications and Personnel
The longtime aide is focused on media strategy and staffing

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAM KERR FOR TIME

Senators have expressed alarm at Hegseth's lack of experience and allegations of sexual assault and alcohol abuse, which he denies. Some also worry about putting Gabbard at the helm of the U.S. intelligence community, given her prior positions in support of Russia and Assad's Syria.

Trump says he will honor the Senate's role in confirming or rejecting his appointments but does not rule out using recess appointments or installing acting agency heads to circumvent Senate approval. "I really don't care how they get them approved," he tells TIME, "as long as they get them approved." Are recess appointments off the table? "No," says a senior Trump adviser. "He's not going to accept being d-cked around."

Trump says he will not ask members of his Administration to sign a formal loyalty pledge. "I think I will be able to, for the most part, determine who's loyal," he says. Anyone who gets crosswise with him, he says, will be gone in short order. That includes firing not only his own Cabinet secretaries and political appointees, but also civil servants who work in the Executive Branch. "If they're not following my policies," he says, "absolutely."

Trump's aggressive use of presidential powers will test the judiciary, the last line of defense against actions that threaten constitutional norms. His critics worry that even if the high court strikes the President's actions, his Justice Department may not enforce the rulings. Trump and his aides are getting ready for an onslaught of lawsuits from groups challenging everything from his immigration measures and attacks on the federal bureaucracy to his attempts to withhold congressionally appropriated funds. "We're constrained by realities of government and process in certain ways," says a Trump official, "but he's gonna try to do big sh-t."

With unified control of Washington, there will be more pressure on Trump to deliver on his campaign promises to lower the cost of living, revive the manufacturing sector, reverse America's trade deficit with China, and make peace abroad. Donald Kettl, an expert on government administration and former dean of the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland, argues that Americans are not prepared for the level of disruption that Trump's second stint in the White House is poised to bring, from potential changes to the education system to revisiting routine childhood vaccines, which Kennedy falsely linked to autism despite scientific evidence to the contrary. "The scale of change that we're going to see is unprecedented, and the implications for government are enormous," he says. Voters believe the government is wasteful and untrustworthy, Kettl adds, but if Trump follows through on his pledge to slash a wide range of programs, "you could end up with blowback very quickly that affects the lives of lots and lots and lots of ordinary Americans."

By the end of Trump's first term, voters were exhausted by the chaos, fed up with his antics, and frustrated by his management of an unprecedented global health crisis. He left office with low approval ratings. Trump's victory in November may be partly the product of short memories. For his part, Trump puts faith in his negotiating abilities. "We can use the same words," he says, "but maybe it's a look in your eye that works." Yet already, the President-elect is moving the goalposts on some of his pledges, like lowering the price of groceries. "It's hard to bring things down once they're up," Trump says. "You know, it's very hard."

'People are genuinely afraid that if they don't listen to him, bad things can happen.'

—VICE PRESIDENT–ELECT J.D. VANCE

If his approach doesn't work and Trump feels boxed in, critics worry he will become ever more extreme. To his closest aides, the President-elect's unpredictable style will give him an edge over America's competitors. "People are genuinely afraid that if they don't listen to him, bad things can happen, and there are consequences for disregarding him," Vance says. Faced with the challenges of governing, Trump seems almost wistful that his last campaign is behind him. "It's sad in a way," he says of his election win as the shadows begin to fall on the manicured lawns around his mansion. "It will never happen again."

But a lot can happen in four years under President Donald J. Trump. —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN *and* SIMMONE SHAH/NEW YORK *and* PHILIP ELLIOTT/CAMBRIDGE, MASS. □

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Lisa SU

BY BILLY PERRIGO/SANTA CLARA, CALIF.

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BY GUERIN
BLASK
FOR TIME

SU
PHOTOGRAPHED
AT THE AMD
OFFICE IN AUSTIN
ON NOV. 14

Lisa Su apologizes if she seems tired. It's the day after the U.S. presidential election, and like much of the nation she was awake until the early hours, transfixed as the results came in, only tearing herself away once it became clear that Donald Trump had won.

"I wanted to know," Su explains as she takes her place at the head of a conference table in the Santa Clara, Calif., headquarters of Advanced Micro Devices (AMD). "It's relevant information."

The identity of the next President is pertinent news to most of America's CEOs, but few more so than the leader of a top semiconductor company. Semiconductors, or chips, are the engines of our computers, phones, cars, internet services, and—increasingly—our artificial intelligence (AI) programs. The relentless rise of the chip over the past seven decades has grown economies, transformed lives, and helped cement the U.S., where most chips get their start, as the globe's postwar hegemon. AMD is one of the world's leading designers of the CPU chips that power both personal computers and data centers, the vast warehouses of servers that make possible the likes of Google, Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft. It's also a top designer of graphics processing units, or GPUs, the specialized chips used to create and run AI programs like ChatGPT. When you send an email, stream a movie, buy something online, or chat with an AI assistant, chances are an AMD chip is providing some of the computing power needed to make that happen. In November, a supercomputer that runs on AMD chips displaced another AMD-based machine to become the world's most powerful.

Which is thanks in large part to Su's leadership. When she became CEO a decade ago, AMD stock was languishing around $3, its share of the data-center chip market had fallen so far that executives rounded it down to zero, and the question on everybody's lips was how long the company had left. An engineer by training, Su spearheaded a bottom-up redesign of AMD's products, repaired relationships with customers, and rode the AI boom to new heights. In 2022 the company's overall value surpassed its historical rival Intel's for the first time. AMD stock now trades at around $140, a nearly 50-fold increase since Su took over. This fall, Harvard Business School began teaching Su's stewardship of AMD as a case study. "It really is one of the great turnaround stories of modern American business history," says Chris Miller, a historian of the semiconductor industry and the author of *Chip War*.

For all its progress, AMD remains the semiconductor industry's distant No. 2. As Su's team was speeding past Intel, both companies were lapped by Nvidia, run by Su's cousin Jensen Huang, which in two years has risen from industry also-ran to become the most valuable company in the world. Nvidia got a jump on its rivals by realizing that its chips, initially made for rendering graphics, happened to be perfectly suited for training neural networks, the programs that underpin modern AI. Of the $32 billion worth of AI data-center GPUs sold in the third quarter of 2024, Nvidia's accounted for some 95%. In November, AMD announced that it would lay off 4% of its global workforce in what it framed as a restructuring to focus on the opportunities from AI. Meanwhile, big tech customers, like Microsoft, Meta, and Amazon, are now designing their own specialized chips for AI workloads, which could reduce their reliance on AMD products. And AMD's continued growth relies on a host of factors outside its control: continued progress in AI; the security of Taiwan, where the vast majority of its top chips are manufactured; and the actions of a notoriously unpredictable U.S. President. Trump's return to the White House will bring new turbulence to an industry that has

DAVID PAUL MORRIS—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

SU UNVEILS A NEW "ACCELERATOR" CHIP AT AN AI EVENT IN SAN JOSE, CALIF., ON DEC. 6, 2023

barely caught its breath from a half-decade of geopolitical showdowns, shortages, and an AI-fueled market boom.

A lot rides on Su's ability to steer the company through these obstacles. People who know her describe Su as a shrewd strategist who invests in talented people and jettisons those who aren't pulling their weight. "I don't believe leaders are born. I believe leaders are trained," she tells TIME, ahead of a strategy meeting where she delivers blunt feedback to her executives and urges them to move faster and delegate more. Su, 55, holds meetings on weekends and is known among her executives for wanting to talk on morning calls about the finer points of long documents that were circulated after midnight. When prototype chips get delivered from the factory, she often personally goes down to the lab to help scrutinize them. It's a hard-charging style that isn't for everyone and makes it difficult for people who don't meet their commitments to survive at the company, according to Patrick Moorhead, a tech-industry analyst and a former AMD executive who left before she joined.

The potential for artificial intelligence to transform science, health care, and the world of work hinges on access to a diverse supply of chips. In the brewing cold war between the U.S. and China, semiconductors are among the most vital battlegrounds. And America's economic success—as measured by its stock market, at least—depends now more than ever on the continued growth of companies that design, produce, and utilize chips. Allies say Su is up to the task. "We couldn't have a person better qualified for this job," says Jerry Sanders, the company's 88-year-old founder and its first CEO. Does she have what it takes to beat Nvidia one day? "Not a question in my mind," he says.

IN OCTOBER 2014, Forrest Norrod was sitting in his car at a McDonald's drive-through when he got a phone call from Su. Norrod had just quit his job as an executive at Dell, intending to take some time off. Su wanted to pitch him on joining AMD, where she had just been appointed CEO. While Norrod waited for his Quarter Pounder with cheese, he listened to her vision for the struggling company. By the next day, he was at AMD's Austin headquarters, weighing the opportunity to lead its server business. Norrod had seen how the pace of innovation in the cloud-chip industry had dropped off once AMD had allowed Intel to dominate the market, and believed that customers were paying the price. He got a sense that Su was a leader with a rare combination of traits: a technical background, business acumen, and people skills. He accepted the job.

Su was born in Taiwan and moved to the U.S. at age 3, when the family immigrated so her father could attend graduate school. She grew up in New York City and discovered a love of STEM subjects at an early age, growing fascinated by the ability to write rudimentary programs on her Commodore 64 computer. She fondly recalls creating, at the science-focused high school she attended in the Bronx, a project in which she simulated a hurricane inside a box, complete with boiling water and windows through which to watch the maelstrom. She chose to major in electrical engineering at MIT after determining that it was the most difficult option—and eventually earned her Ph.D. in the subject.

It was at MIT that Su first experienced a semiconductor lab, where she was taken by the idea that such a tiny piece of hardware could carry so much mathematical firepower. She spent the first years of her career at Texas Instruments and IBM, two first-wave tech titans, which taught her about how to run a business and manage teams. "I was really lucky early in my career," she says. "Every two years, I did a different thing." She accepted

a VP job at AMD in 2012, and by 2014 had ascended to CEO. "I felt like I was in training for the opportunity to do something meaningful in the semiconductor industry," she says. "And AMD was my shot."

Su took over an indebted firm that had fired 25% of its staff, sold and leased back its Austin office, and spun off its expensive chip factories. It was a moment of change for the tech industry writ large. Smartphones and tablets were ascendant. Consumer PCs, AMD's main market, were in decline. "It didn't look at the time that Lisa was really set up for success," says Stacy Rasgon, a chip-industry analyst. "She was handed a tough situation." Su's turnaround plan had three steps: build great products, focus on customer relationships, and simplify the business. Some AMD board members wanted to pivot toward making low-power processors for phones. Su rejected that approach. "We needed to bet on what we were good at," she says.

What AMD was good at was building powerful processors. Su set a goal for her engineers: to build a new CPU chip that was 40% faster than the previous generation's. And she started a team on an even more ambitious project: to explore how to develop a chip for the world's first exascale supercomputer, a machine capable of carrying out 1 quintillion operations per second. The decisions revealed a core tenet of Su's leadership philosophy. "People are really motivated by ambitious goals," she says. "The previous strategy of, hey, let's just do a little bit better here and there—that's actually less motivational."

'We couldn't have a person better qualified for this job.'

—AMD FOUNDER JERRY SANDERS, ON SU'S LEADERSHIP

The problem was that Su's plans would take years to come to fruition. In the meantime, AMD was still on the ropes. "My job as a CEO was to give the engineers time to do the work," Su says. She inked deals with console manufacturers that won AMD the revenue it needed to keep afloat. In 2016, she signed another with a consortium of Chinese companies, licensing some of AMD's designs so they could make processors for the Chinese market. That deal brought in $293 million, though it would later come back to haunt AMD.

By 2017, the company was on stronger financial footing and the new flagship chip was finally ready. Engineers had redesigned the CPU from the ground up, making use of a new architecture, which the company called "chiplets." Until then, the chip industry had mainly etched the different parts of a processor onto one piece of silicon. AMD's innovation was to put different circuits onto individual pieces of silicon and then fuse them all together, which made manufacturing more reliable and scalable. Engineers suggested to Su that they call the new chip "Zen," because it was designed with a balance in mind between energy efficiency and high performance. The name stuck.

Meanwhile, Intel, AMD's main competitor, was beginning to flounder. Its new cloud processors were beset by delays. When AMD's chips hit the market, they were the best on the block. With each new generation of Zen, AMD's share of the cloud-CPU market grew. Today, its share of that market is 34%. When AMD's overall valuation surpassed Intel's in 2022, "it felt fantastic," Norrod says. "It's something that I don't think anybody in the industry would have believed was possible just a few years ago."

ONE RECENT AFTERNOON at AMD's Santa Clara headquarters, Su was sitting with several senior executives in the CEO's favorite corner conference room, where the offices of both Nvidia and Intel are visible through the glass. In the meeting, Su pressed her colleagues to meet engineering milestones for the specialized chips that AMD sells for use in AI data centers. "We cannot miss a beat," Su told them. "We have negative slack. Whatever we do organizationally, we cannot slow down."

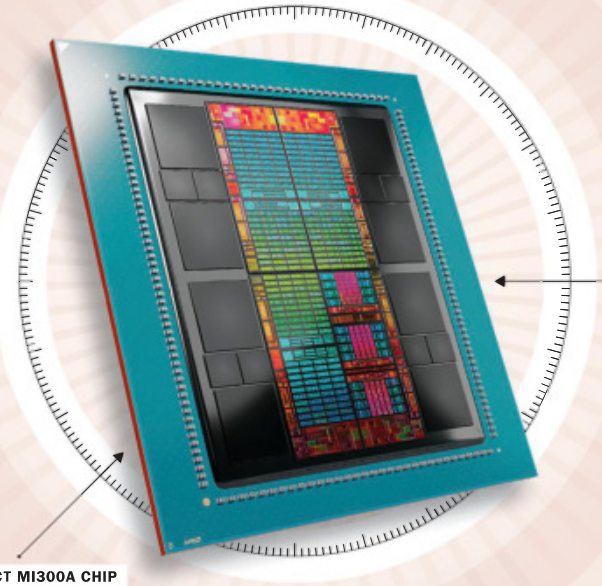
AMD is grappling with geopolitical challenges that could reshape the semiconductor industry. Today's chips have billions of transistors, tiny gates for managing electric current. To manufacture them requires colossal machines with hundreds of thousands of specialized parts, which fire lasers at tiny droplets of molten tin to create extreme ultraviolet light that bounces through a series of multilayered mirrors and, ultimately, etches designs onto thin wafers of silicon with atomic-level accuracy. A stray particle

IT TAKES ALL KINDS

AMD produces several different types of chip. Think of each one as optimized for carrying out different types of tasks.

CPU

The central processing unit takes its actions in sequence, one after another. It is the engine of most traditional computers because it's adaptable and powerful.



AMD INSTINCT MI300A CHIP

GPU

The graphics processing unit can carry out thousands of calculations at the same time, or in parallel. It was initially made to render computer images on a screen in real time, but its design is also well suited to training AI neural networks.

APU

The accelerated processing unit combines the skills of both CPUs and GPUs. It is the engine of most modern supercomputers because it can run tasks either in sequence or in parallel, depending on which would be more efficient.

COURTESY AMD

in the machine, a half-degree fluctuation in temperature, or a nanometer-scale vibration could each threaten a batch of chips worth millions of dollars. The process is so complex, fragile, and expensive that only one company is currently able to manufacture at scale the most cutting-edge chips designed by the likes of AMD and Nvidia: Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. The industry's most advanced chips may be conceived in Silicon Valley, but their fabrication is almost entirely outsourced to just a handful of factories on the west coast of Taiwan.

Some 80 miles across the Taiwan Strait lies China, which claims the self-governing island as its territory. Chinese President Xi Jinping has instructed his military to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027, according to U.S. intelligence assessments made public last year. And Xi has set China on a path to reduce its technological dependence on the U.S. by producing powerful chips of its own. Without Taiwanese manufacturing, the semiconductor industry would be upended and the world's supply of advanced chips would plummet. And if Beijing's effort to become a world-leading semiconductor producer is successful, it would set up China's military and AI industry to match or outpace America's, which many in Washington view as a national-security threat.

In this light, Su's 2016 decision to go into business with Chinese state-backed companies looks like a misstep. Pentagon officials tried and failed to block the deal at the time, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal,* which cited worries that AMD had transferred crucial know-how that could aid China's military and domestic semiconductor ambitions. AMD denied suggestions that it had sought to evade regulatory scrutiny on the deal, saying that it had correctly briefed the Pentagon and other agencies and had received no objections, and that the *Journal*'s story contained "several factual errors and omissions." At the time, there were few laws against technology transfer to China, and deeper economic integration between the two powers was viewed by many as natural. "It was a very different era," Su says. But the music would quickly change. In 2019, the Trump Administration placed AMD's Chinese joint venture on the "entity list" that restricts exports of critical technologies to foreign adversaries because of perceived security risks. In 2022, the Biden Administration passed broader export controls that made it illegal for companies like AMD and Nvidia to sell their most advanced chips to Chinese companies.

Demand for specialized AI chips is so high, and their supply so constrained, that these export controls have so far had little effect on chipmakers' bottom lines. But Trump is expected to further expand tariffs and sanctions on China, which could quickly become painful for chip companies. Some 15% of AMD's revenue in 2023—$3.4 billion—came from the legal sale of less powerful chips to China and Hong Kong. AMD warned investors in October that its business could be adversely affected by tariffs, as well as any retaliatory measures imposed by foreign governments. If it's any consolation for AMD's market position, its rivals are even more exposed: in 2023, China and Hong Kong accounted for 17% of Nvidia's revenue, and China represented 27% of Intel's. "We want to service the entire world with our chips," Su says. "[But] I'm certainly a believer in: we want to be the most advanced semiconductor country."

'You have to run faster.'
—SU, ON COMPETING WITH CHINA

Still, AMD is incentivized to lobby against the widening of chip export controls, even if officials determine that more sanctions would be in the interests of national security. The Semiconductor Industry Association, a trade group of U.S. chip companies including AMD, argues against export controls, and has spent more than $4.5 million since 2022 lobbying lawmakers in Washington, according to the watchdog OpenSecrets. "You have to run faster," Su says of her view of the U.S.'s competition with China. She says her main goal with any lobbying is to help lawmakers make sure "that any desired policy has the desired effect," adding, "We certainly want to be a good corporate citizen."

INSIDE A HIGH-SECURITY LABORATORY beyond the dry hills at Silicon Valley's eastern edge, a team of government scientists celebrated a major milestone in November. The machine under their care, housed in a room longer than a football field, had just achieved the official title of most powerful supercomputer in the world. If every single person on earth were to make one calculation per second, it would take them over 480 years to calculate what this supercomputer could in one minute. The machine is called El Capitan, after the massive granite rock formation in Yosemite National Park. At its heart are more than 44,000 AMD chips called accelerated processing units (APUs), which combine elements of CPUs and GPUs in the same chip. When Su heard the news that El Capitan had officially become the most powerful supercomputer in the world, she was ecstatic. "These are the days I live for," she says. The achievement meant that the two most powerful supercomputers in the world are now powered by AMD chips.

For Su, the win was about more than just bragging rights. "I personally visited the labs several times," she says. Fulfilling her pledge to create best-in-class technology became almost an obsession, just as delivering Zen chips on time to waiting customers had been years earlier. "She's so, so customer-centric," says Vamsi Boppana, AMD's senior vice president for AI. "She absolutely wants to delight, and that has served the company so well."

Su views supercomputing as the wellspring from which further AI profits will flow. The chips in El Capitan are "without a doubt, the most complex thing we've ever built," she says. But they were not a single-purpose investment. The designs that AMD engineers used for El Capitan are already trickling down

into the specialized AI chips supplied to clients like Meta and Microsoft. The most advanced AMD chip currently on sale in the AI market, called the Instinct MI300X, is the "first cousin" of the chips inside El Capitan, says Mark Papermaster, AMD's chief technology officer. That's thanks to their chiplet-based designs, which make it relatively simple to switch in and out different components. "There is so much synergy between traditional high-performance supercomputing and AI," Su says.

AMD always had a business in building GPUs for gaming, but after the release of ChatGPT in 2022, the company quickly spun up a more powerful line aimed at the data-center market. And in the past year, AMD's projected revenue from specialized AI chip sales has leaped from essentially $0 to $5 billion, which would account for roughly 5% of that market. (Nvidia maintains a hammerlock on most of the rest.) This line of chips is now a popular choice for what's known in the industry as AI "inference," or the running of an already-formed AI system.

GARRY MCLEOD—LLNL

EL CAPITAN, THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL SUPERCOMPUTER, USES AMD CHIPS

For years, the easiest way to increase AI performance was by simply training bigger models on more GPU chips. But as some computer scientists report diminishing returns from that practice, companies are now turning to a different strategy: increasing the time AIs spend running instead—in the inference phase, rather than the training phase. That could be good news for AMD, whose inference chips are approaching parity with Nvidia's in terms of not only speed but also energy efficiency, which matters even more when you're running an AI over a longer period. "We do see inference as a growing piece of the market," says Boppana.

AMD is still struggling to break into the training phase of the market. That's largely because Nvidia controls the world's leading software for optimizing GPUs for that purpose—and it only works with Nvidia chips. The huge number of developers who already use it gives Nvidia an ongoing advantage. AMD is building its own competing software, but it is "absolutely behind Nvidia's," says Moorhead, the former AMD executive. Su says AMD is catching up. That's partly thanks to an informal alliance with tech companies, including Meta, that want to avoid handing Nvidia an outright monopoly. Meta is buying AMD chips, contributing to AMD's code base, and using its software in its data centers. "It's a very good symbiotic relationship," says Moorhead. "Without AMD, Nvidia can double their prices." Says Su: "Nobody wants to be locked into a proprietary ecosystem. Really our strategy is: let's invest in an open ecosystem. And then may the best chip win."

Yet in their bid to reduce their reliance on Nvidia, major AI companies have also begun to design some of their own chips in-house. That could threaten AMD in the long term. But Su doesn't see it that way. "I actually see it as an opportunity," she says. No company wants to replicate the $6 billion AMD pours into R&D annually, she argues. She sees instead a future where big tech companies continue to spend on AMD's chips, while also relying on their own chips for certain workloads. "There's no one-size-fits-all in computing," she says. "The broader the ecosystem, the bigger the party."

If Su is right, the size of the party is going to keep on growing. She predicts the specialized AI chip market alone will grow to be worth $500 billion by 2028—more than the size of the entire semiconductor industry a decade ago. To be the No. 2 company in that market would still make AMD a behemoth. Sure, AMD won't be overtaking Nvidia anytime soon. But Su measures her plans in decades. "When you invest in a new area, it is a five- to 10-year arc to really build out all of the various pieces," she says. "The thing about our business is, everything takes time." —*With reporting by* SIMMONE SHAH/NEW YORK

TIME Athlete OF THE Year 2024

CLARK PHOTOGRAPHED AT GAINBRIDGE FIELDHOUSE IN INDIANAPOLIS ON OCT. 30

Caitlin CLARK

BY SEAN GREGORY/INDIANAPOLIS

PHOTOGRAPH BY CASS BIRD FOR TIME

Few jobs require less physical exertion than rebounding for Caitlin Clark. On an early-November morning in downtown Indianapolis, Clark sprints along the three-point line at the Fever practice gym, trying to bang as many shots as possible over a six-minute span.

A Fever coach has tasked me with standing under the basket to retrieve her misses. But as Clark, the two-time college national player of the year for the University of Iowa, reigning WNBA Rookie of the Year from the Indiana Fever, and emergent American sports icon, runs all over the court to launch long-range bombs, I barely have to move. *Swish, swish, swish.* She hits 14 shots in a row. A dozen in a row. Eleven in a row. Nine in a row. Another nine.

Sure, she's putting on this display in practice. But her ability is still mesmerizing. Clark, 22, takes shots with a degree of difficulty never before witnessed in the women's game; her signature 30-ft. launches, from near half-court on team logos across America, are akin to home-run balls, hanging high in the air. Can she actually make that flabbergasting attempt? *Yes!* it turns out. Over and over again.

After her workout I fill Clark in on the statistics from her shooting session: 93 three-pointers in six minutes, good for an 85% success rate.

"Wow," she responds. "That's pretty good."

Nice to know that after wowing so many around the world throughout her record-breaking year, Clark can still impress herself. In February, she set the new NCAA Division I women's basketball scoring record. A few weeks later, she broke Hall of Famer Pete Maravich's mark, making her the top scorer overall. Her college championship game between Iowa and South Carolina averaged 18.9 million viewers, becoming the second most watched women's sporting event, outside the Olympic Games, in the history of U.S. television. As a pro, she set a rookie record for most three-pointers made in a season, while also setting new all-time WNBA marks for most assists in a season and most assists in a single game. She signed a reported $28 million endorsement deal with Nike, the largest ever for a women's basketball player. Clark's Fever appeared in the most watched WNBA games ever on ABC, CBS, ESPN, and ESPN2. The WNBA attracted an all-time record of more than 54 million unique viewers across all its national broadcasting platforms during the regular season, and the league's overall attendance jumped to its highest level in more than two decades. The Fever broke a WNBA record for home attendance by a single franchise, and Fever games were moved to NBA and NHL arenas in Las Vegas, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., to accommodate the hordes of fans, many donning Clark's No. 22 jersey.

When asked to define her year in one word, Clark chooses *historic.* Clark, it quickly becomes clear, is polite and down-to-earth but also has not an ounce of false humility. "I've been able to captivate so many people that have never watched women's sports, let alone women's basketball, and turn them into fans," she says. Good luck naming another player who altered the trajectory of their entire team sport within five months on the job. Lionel Messi had a monumental influence on Major League Soccer when he arrived in Miami last year, but he was in year 20 of his pro career. Michael Jordan energized the NBA in the mid-1980s, but Larry Bird and Magic Johnson had already put the league on solid footing. While other female athletes have pushed the limits of human achievement and created their own cultures—Serena Williams, Simone Biles, and the stars of the U.S. women's national soccer team all come to mind—the Clark phenomenon is still unprecedented. It's one thing to rally around athletes during global spectacles like an Olympics or a World Cup. It's quite another to turn routine regular-season games in the WNBA, a league neglected for far too long over its 27-year history, into appointment viewing.

To be clear, Clark had plenty of help. The WNBA was already enjoying positive momentum going into the 2024 season, thanks to MVPs like A'ja Wilson and Breanna Stewart, and some of Clark's fellow rookies, like Angel Reese and Cameron Brink, brought their own followings. But Clark took the league—and the sport—to a new level. Even during a period when investment across women's sports is surging, team valuations are on the rise, and fan interest and engagement are at

DAVID E. KLUTHO—SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY IMAGES

CLARK DRIVES TO THE HOOP IN INDIANAPOLIS AGAINST THE SEATTLE STORM ON AUG. 18

all-time highs, her arrival was transformative.

Clark's skyrocketing fame has upended her life at a dizzying rate. She now has an advance security squad. A fan asked her to sign a sonogram. The Golf Channel covered her appearance at an LPGA pro-am as if she were Tiger Woods in his prime. "She's box office," says Atlanta Dream co-owner Renee Montgomery, a former WNBA player.

At times, the plot proved unpleasant. All year, Clark found herself party to raging debates, even though she rarely, if ever, did anything to perpetrate them. "I tell people I feel like the most controversial person," says Clark. "But I am not. It's just because of all the storylines that surround me. I literally try to live and treat everybody in the same exact respectful, kind way." That her gender played a role in the level of scrutiny is hard to deny. Clark's introductory press conference with the Fever was a harbinger of things to come: a male reporter appeared to make a cringeworthy attempt at flirtation with Clark; he was suspended and prohibited from covering the Fever. As the season progressed, more flash points emerged—whether concerning the marketing advantage granted by her race, fouls that players committed against her, or her exclusion from the U.S. Olympic team—that spurred her so-called defenders to push racist, misogynistic, anti-LGBTQ narratives, or even threaten WNBA players directly. She calls this toxicity "upsetting" and "gross," but during the season she addressed the discourse mostly when asked about it in courtside interviews or at press conferences rather than proactively engaging with it. "It's not something I can control … and to be honest, I don't see a lot of it," she told the Athletic's Jim Trotter in June. Her extended interview with TIME marks the first time she's talked at length about her year.

"All of this is really speaking to something much larger than Caitlin Clark," says Theresa Runstedtler, a scholar of African American history at American University. "It's speaking to our unresolved issues about race, gender, and sexuality in American society, at this particularly fraught moment in our political landscape."

Still, in the face of all this heaviness, *joy* remains the resonant vibe of Clark's 2024. Her talent brought together communities to celebrate her fire, unselfish play, and ability to score in inconceivable ways when she needed to. Clark certainly fed off this electricity. "You feel powerful," Clark says. "People are invested in the game, they love the game, and that's what makes it so fun for me. These people aren't supporting women's sports to check a box. It's going to be the new normal."

THE WEEKEND BEFORE our interview, Clark attended back-to-back Taylor Swift shows at Lucas Oil Stadium. She met Swift's mother and boyfriend, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. When fans noticed her sitting in a suite, they turned around to take pictures or toss her friendship bracelets. "People are just going crazy that I'm there," she says. "I thought people would be so in their own world, ready to see Taylor. And it was just completely the opposite."

Swift gave Clark four bags of Eras Tour merchandise with a note saying Clark was inspiring to watch from afar. She said "Trav and I" were excited to get to a Fever game now that the tour was winding down and invited Clark to attend a Chiefs game with her.

Clark has always seemed destined for greatness, if not friendship with the biggest pop star in the world. Her path to this women's-sports paradigm shift started in West Des Moines, Iowa, where Clark played multiple sports as a kid. She's the second of three children; her father Brent Clark is executive vice president at a company that sells and distributes agricultural and industrial parts, and her mother Anne Nizzi-Clark is a retired marketing executive. Jan Jensen, an Iowa assistant coach at the time, first watched Clark play when she was in middle school: she hit a step-back three-pointer and threw a long pass her teammate couldn't catch. But the ball was on the money. "You could see her swag," says Jensen. "The way she walked. In a peewee game, when everybody's like, 'Your shot hit the rim, let's go get ice cream,' she's like, 'I don't want any freaking ice cream. I want to win.' That's when the Caitlin Clark mission began."

Her Catholic family wanted her to pick Notre Dame for college, but Clark shunned the Fighting Irish to play for her home-state school. She put up big numbers at Iowa immediately but had trouble hiding her frustrations. She'd shake her head when someone screwed up. Or take it out on a towel. Or a chair. The coaching staff worked with Clark to improve her body language, and she reined it in for the most part. By her junior year, Iowa was knocking off undefeated South Carolina in the national semis to reach the finals against LSU.

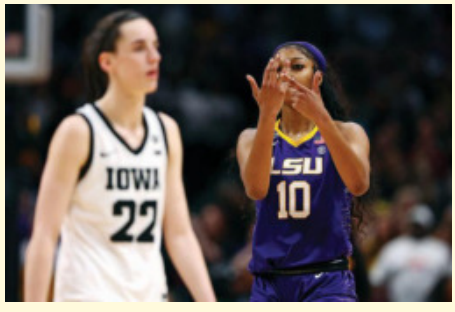
That championship game was Clark's inauguration into the 24-hour sports-news cycle. In the final moments, when it was clear LSU would win, Tigers forward Angel Reese approached Clark and pointed at her ring finger, a bit of trash-talking that sparked needlessly cruel backlash; Reese was labeled "classless" and worse. Clark and Reese were pitted against each other as rivals, a narrative that has carried over to the WNBA. "I don't get that at all," says Clark. "We're not best friends, by any means, but we're very respectful of one another."

Going into her senior year, Clark was in a much different position than women's basketball players who had come before her. Iowa played summer exhibition games in Italy and Croatia, and with the help of name, image, and likeness (NIL) sponsorship money from brands like Nike, Buick, and the Midwestern grocery chain Hy-Vee, Clark treated her teammates to a yacht outing in the Adriatic. "I wouldn't say it was boozy," says former Iowa manager Will McIntyre, now director of scouting and technology for the Rutgers women's team. "I would say bougie."

Clark loved college life, and even considered returning for a fifth year instead of entering the 2024 WNBA draft. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, NCAA players were granted an extra year of eligibility. Around January, however, Clark knew it was time to

FROM DES MOINES TO THE DRAFT

CLARK, AT 15, READIES TO FIRE FOR HER YOUTH TEAM—ALL IOWA ATTACK—IN AMES ON JULY 28, 2017



ANGEL REESE OF LSU LETS CLARK KNOW WHO'S ABOUT TO WIN THE 2023 NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP

YOUTH TEAM: LUKE LU—DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; SCORING RECORD: MATTHEW HOLST—GETTY IMAGES; WNBA DRAFT: SARAH STIER—GETTY IMAGES; REESE: MADDIE MEYER—GETTY IMAGES

CLARK CELEBRATES THE 35-FT. "LOGO" THREE ON FEB. 15 THAT BROKE THE WOMEN'S SCORING MARK

THE INDIANA FEVER MAKE CLARK THE FIRST PICK IN THE WNBA DRAFT ON APRIL 15

move on. It helped that the Fever had won the draft lottery, assuring that Clark, unquestionably the No. 1 pick, would begin her career in the Midwest. She announced her intention to enter the draft at the end of February. Lin Dunn, then the Fever general manager—now a senior adviser—saw the news on X. "I would have done a back handspring if I wasn't 77 years old," says Dunn.

About a month later, on the eve of this year's NCAA tournament, West Virginia's coach told his players, "Let's send Caitlin Clark packing." So after Iowa dispatched the Mountaineers in the second round, Clark stood on the scorer's table and sang "Country Roads" at the top of her lungs. "I kind of just troll," Clark says.

After a much hyped Clark-Reese rematch in the Elite Eight that drew the second largest ESPN audience to any basketball game, college or pro, in a dozen years, the Hawkeyes fell short in the championship game for the second straight year, this time to once again undefeated South Carolina. During the podium celebration Dawn Staley, the venerated Gamecocks coach, clutched the mic and said, "I want to personally thank Caitlin Clark for lifting up our sport."

Clark had little time to reflect on her accomplishments. Two days before the WNBA draft, she flew to New York City after staying up late in Los Angeles while receiving the Wooden Award as national player of the year, went straight to the *SNL* set, and collapsed on a couch there from fatigue. She got big laughs during her "Weekend Update" segment needling co-host Michael Che for past jokes about women's sports. Her favorite: after Che told Clark that he'd pass along a signed apron she gave him to his girlfriend, Clark quipped, "You don't have a girlfriend, Michael."

Clark's segment did include a more serious moment, as she thanked a quintet of Black women—Lisa Leslie, Sheryl Swoopes, Cynthia Cooper, Staley, and Maya Moore, Clark's basketball hero growing up—for paving the way for her success. These stars, despite their athletic prowess, were never rewarded with the same level of attention that Clark is now receiving. "America was founded on segregation and to this day is very much about Black and White," Fever center Temi Fagbenle, who loved playing with Clark this season, writes in a text message. "In a sport dominated by Black/African-American players, White America has rallied around Caitlin Clark. The support looks mostly amazing, sometimes fanatical and territorial, sometimes racist. It seems that the Great White Hope syndrome is at play again." Going into the WNBA season, Wilson, a two-time league champion and now three-time WNBA MVP, told the Associated Press she thought Clark's race was a "huge" contributor to her popularity.

Clark is cognizant of the racial underpinnings of her stardom. "I want to say I've earned every single thing, but as a white person, there is privilege," says Clark. "A lot of those players in the league that have been really good have been Black players. This league has kind of been built on them. The more we can elevate Black women, that's going to be a beautiful thing."

'I tell people I feel like the most controversial person. But I am not.'

—CAITLIN CLARK

WHEN CLARK AND her fellow soon-to-be rookies arrived at the WNBA draft on April 15, it was clear that women's basketball had entered a new era. Clark, whom fans had seen mostly in her jersey, gym shorts, and ponytail, became the first athlete, in the WNBA or NBA, to be dressed for the draft head-to-toe in Prada, right down to the tinted sunglasses she wore on the "orange carpet."

Christie Sides, the Fever coach this past season, recalls the throng of people gathered to watch Clark walk to the bus before her regular-season debut against the Connecticut Sun. "It was people my age," says Sides, 47. "It was people my parents' age. It was people between my and my parents' age. I saw people crying. I saw people shaking. It made me think of the Beatles. Or Elvis."

Despite all the hype, however, the Fever's season threatened to implode before it ever really got started. Clark committed 10 turnovers in that debut game, a new record for a career opener. The schedule offered no favors to the young team. The Fever faced the Sun, a league semifinalist this season, and the New York Liberty, the 2024 champs, in its first four contests, before heading west for a three-game swing that included a matchup against the 2023 champs, the Las Vegas Aces.

Clark was also adjusting to the rigors of the WNBA. "Professional players and professional coaches—this is no disrespect to college women's basketball—are a lot smarter," she says. "I love women's college basketball. But if you go back and watch the way people guarded me in college, it's almost, like, concerning. They didn't double me, they didn't trap me, they weren't physical. And it's hard. It's college. A lot of those women will never go on to play another basketball game in their life. They don't have the IQ of understanding how the game works. So I completely understand it."

There were glimmers of hope during Indiana's 1-8 start. Clark had a few big scoring games and was second in the league in assists. She was named league Rookie of the Month for May. She wasn't having trouble getting her shot off. She just wasn't making enough of them. She was spotting open teammates. She just needed to clean up some of the passes. "I never really got down because I knew everything was so controllable," says Clark. "I would come home at night and would be like, 'This is so annoying.' Because I know I'm literally, like, right there, of being one of the best players in the league." She holds her forefinger a milinch from her thumb. "I knew I was so close to doing so many amazing things."

CLARK'S 2024 WNBA RECORDS

769
MOST POINTS BY A POINT GUARD

337
MOST ASSISTS IN A SEASON

223
MOST TURNOVERS IN A SEASON

122
MOST THREE-POINTERS BY A ROOKIE

19
MOST ASSISTS IN A GAME

12
MOST DOUBLE-DOUBLES BY A GUARD

2
MOST TRIPLE-DOUBLES BY A ROOKIE

When the Fever hosted the Chicago Sky on June 1, Indiana gutted out a 71-70 victory. But that game won't be remembered for the basketball. In the third quarter, Chicago's Chennedy Carter hip-checked Clark to the floor. Carter was called for a foul, which the next day was upgraded to a flagrant-1 violation. But while the WNBA could revise the ruling, it could not stem the ensuing furor. That Angel Reese jumped off the bench and appeared to cheer Carter only added fuel to another Clark-adjacent fire. Some pundits cited Carter's foul as evidence that jealous players, particularly Black players, were targeting Clark. The Chicago *Tribune* weighed in with an editorial, imploring that Clark "must not be allowed to become a target for rule breakers." The intense commentary came with consequences. Security had to intervene at the Sky's hotel a few days later when a man approached Carter with a camera. "I've been called every racial slur imaginable lately and my teammates have had it even worse," Sky forward Brianna Turner wrote on X.

Clark casts aside any notion that envious opponents were coming after her. "I *never* thought I was being targeted," says Clark.

HILARY SWIFT—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

AFTER AN IOWA WIN OVER WISCONSIN IN JANUARY, CLARK SIGNS AUTOGRAPHS FOR HER FANS

"Obviously, that shouldn't ever happen within a game. But basketball is physical. Your emotions can get the best of you. My emotions have gotten the best of me many times." She says she did not see Reese cheering from the bench. "I don't even know if she really knew what happened," says Clark. "Honestly, I don't think she was cheering because somebody hit me. I really don't think that would be the case. I hope not." Reese's representatives did not make her available for this article.

"A lot of people that wanted to have opinions on what was happening probably didn't even watch half the games that they were trying to have a take on and hadn't supported the W for a really long time," says Clark.

The day after the incident, in a matchup against the Liberty, Clark ran into a Jonquel Jones screen and ruptured her eardrum. She shot 1-10 from the field in a 36-point drubbing. A five-day reprieve in the schedule came at the perfect moment.

During these off days, Clark shot extremely well during drills. "That gave me a lot of confidence," says Clark. "It just reiterates, 'You are one of the best shooters.'" In Indiana's first game back, Clark hit seven three-pointers en route to a 30-point game and a Fever victory. On the bus, Clark texted her agent that she hoped that performance helped her case to make the Olympic team for Paris. Clark's agent responded immediately: I have to call you.

"And I'm like, 'Sh-t,'" says Clark.

THE NEWS, PREDICTABLY, was unpleasant: the Olympic roster was about to leak, and Clark wasn't on it. USA basketball officials hopped on a call with Clark. "They were like, 'Yeah, we haven't selected you. Obviously, we think the world of how you play and blah, blah, blah.'" She wasn't really listening. She knew she was good enough to be on the team. And she had heard rumblings that she would be.

At the same time, she understood the decision. "A point everybody was making was like, 'Who are you taking off the team?'" Clark says. "And that was a tremendous point." Clark also admits that during her early stretch for the 3-9 Fever, "I gave them a lot of reasons to keep me off the team with my play."

Many people, however, rushed to her defense. The gist of the pro-Clark case: women's basketball missed a golden marketing opportunity to grow the sport. "I don't want to be there because I'm somebody that can bring attention," says Clark. "I want to be there because they think I'm good enough. I don't want to be some little person that is kind of dragged around for people to cheer about and only watch because I'm sitting on the bench. That whole narrative kind of upset me. It's disrespectful to the people that were on the team, that had earned it and were really good. And it's also disrespectful to myself."

Clark told Sides the snub "woke a monster." She believes being left off the Paris roster "will definitely motivate me my entire career" and calls her exclusion a "blessing." Not only did it fuel her to prove that she belonged on the team, it also granted her a much needed break: there'd be a one-month pause in the WNBA schedule to accommodate players competing at the Olympics.

The monster arose almost immediately, as the Fever began to turn their season around. Indiana went on a four-game winning streak in June. Clark recorded the first-ever rookie triple-double (at least 10 points, assists, and rebounds) during a victory against the Liberty. She started in the WNBA All-Star Game—against the U.S. Olympic team—and her 10 assists helped her side to a 117-110 victory. Most importantly, her All-Star experience further dispelled the notion that her pro colleagues were out to put her in her place.

Her fellow All-Stars, Clark says, "are all looking to me to call the plays. It just showed the sign of respect they really do have for me."

During the first week of the Olympic break, she escaped to Cabo San Lucas with her boyfriend, former Iowa basketball player Connor McCaffery, who spent the past season as a basketball-development staffer with the Pacers and is now an assistant coach at Butler University. She drank "a million" Shirley Temples, with Sprite; devoured French brioche; and read Emily Henry's *Happy Place*. When the Fever returned to the court for games, they won seven of their first eight. Clark led the team to the playoffs for the first time since 2016 and raised her play to All-WNBA First Team level.

Clark thought Indiana could make it to the championship. In the end, however, the Sun swept the Fever in the first round—but not before Clark found herself at the center of one last controversy: in Game 1, Connecticut's DiJonai Carrington poked Clark in the eye while trying to deflect a pass. The contact became more fodder for social media and elsewhere. After *USA Today*'s Christine Brennan asked Carrington if she intended to hit Clark in the eye—"Obviously, it's never intentional," Carrington said—the WNBA players union publicly called for Brennan's credentials to be revoked, saying the interview was "a blatant attempt to bait a professional athlete into participating in a narrative that is false and designed to fuel racist, homophobic, and misogynistic vitriol on social media." After the Sun eliminated the Fever, Connecticut's Alyssa Thomas said, "I think that in my 11-year career I never experienced the racial comments [like] from the Indiana Fever fan base."

This whole contretemps still annoys Clark. "Never once did that cross my mind, that it was on purpose," she says. Clark feels debate about intent reveals a gender double standard. "If that would have happened in the NBA, do you think people would have showed up the next day and been like, 'Hey, Tyrese Haliburton, did you poke Steph Curry in the eye on purpose?'" she says. While Clark says she wasn't aware that the union was going to reprimand Brennan, she supported its decision. "That whole line of questioning that [Carrington] got was not appropriate, and I did not like that," she says.

Many observers seem inclined to reserve judgment on Clark and her approach to confronting off-court issues given that she was a rookie adjusting to life as an athletic icon. "She should be afforded some grace," Fagbenle texts. When asked if Clark did enough to combat the racist threats against other players, Montgomery, the Atlanta Dream co-owner and former player, declined to comment. Dream forward Cheyenne Parker-Tyus, meanwhile, says she thinks Clark handled it all well. "I'm not concerned about her and how she stands with racial comments or hateful comments," she says. "She feels the way we all feel. She's made that clear."

"I know people want her to say more and do more, and I'm like, at 22 years old, how many of us have the skill set, have the ability to be able to communicate?" says former Fever star and Hall of Famer Tamika Catchings. "She's a game changer on the court, but having to be a game changer off the court and get into the politics part of it, I don't know if that's her responsibility."

"What comes with being a professional athlete is speaking on important issues," says four-time WNBA champion Sue Bird. "And so I imagine she's going to continue to educate and get better at that as well. In today's world, people will use you if you don't speak about your own feelings and thoughts. So by getting more comfortable and confident in your voice, you can eliminate that."

Clark says she really does stay off social media during the season and wasn't aware that talk about the eye poke, for example, was percolating until she was asked about it. But she hears the calls imploring her to step up for her colleagues. "I'm probably the most popular player in the league at the moment, and somebody a lot of people turn to to have a voice on this type of stuff," says Clark. "I hope we can do a better job as a league of protecting our players and putting better resources around them to make it a safer environment. And obviously, there's only so much you can police on social media, because we don't have full control over social media. But there is real responsibility. I understand that, and I acknowledge that." So what's her message to bad-faith actors harassing others in her name? "Just stop," says Clark. "Because that's not who I am."

'Personally, I'm just scratching the surface of what I can do.'

—CAITLIN CLARK

CASS BIRD FOR TIME

CLARK WAS NAMED ROOKIE OF THE YEAR IN OCTOBER, RECEIVING 66 OUT OF 67 VOTES

TO GET TO LUNCH after her workout, I trail Clark down a rainy back alleyway that smells like garbage, past the "Ray's Trash Service" bins, through the kitchen, down a narrow flight of stairs to a private room of a restaurant scouted by her security team. I tell Clark and Fever guard Lexie Hull, who has joined us, that the walk reminded me of the famous scene from *Goodfellas* where the mafioso played by Ray Liotta enters the Copacabana through the kitchen. They haven't seen the film but appreciate the comparison. "We're mobsters," says Clark.

Over carnitas and fish tacos, we talk about their new head coach, Stephanie White, who had been hired three days earlier. Clark insists she had nothing to do with the change. "I'm actually not the general manager of the team," she says. "Believe it or not!" adds Hull.

Clark's eyes are glued to the TV, where the USC women are playing Ole Miss. "I feel like if I was out there, I would literally have 50," says Clark. "The college game is so much easier than professional."

But Clark knows she can get better. She expresses admiration for White's game plans against the Fever when she was coach of the Sun. "We didn't usually have the best game plan back," Clark said when White stopped by the gym during her workout. "Like, here's a ball screen, Caitlin. Figure it out."

At one point talk turned to Clark's high school soccer career. "I would get so many yellow cards," Clark said.

"You still do," said White.

Indeed, Clark finished her season with six technical fouls, tied for second most in the WNBA. "I only probably deserved, like—two."

"Haaaaa!" White yelled. "She's a comedian too."

Controlling Clark's fire has always been a challenge for her coaches. It makes her special, but techs can come back to bite you. Same with her mistakes: Clark shattered the WNBA's all-time season record for turnovers, but you want her throwing some high-risk passes. As for other areas of improvement, Clark's working on her midrange shooting. "I used to have a middie bag," she says. "I just never had to use it."

Speculation was swirling about whether Clark would play in Unrivaled, the new 3-on-3 league founded by Stewart and Napheesa Collier that begins in January. The startup has attracted attention as a way for WNBA players to make more money without having to play overseas. Still, Clark—who made $75,535 in salary her first year on the Fever but thanks to her many endorsements is doing just fine financially—is taking a pass. "I kind of want to just stay out of the spotlight," she says.

She'll be back there soon enough. "Personally, I'm just scratching the surface of what I can do and hopefully how I can change the world and impact people," she says. "There's also been so many people that are not involved in women's sports, that are just in the workforce, or whatever they do, and they're just like, 'Thank you for what you do for women.' I've heard that a million times."

Her day concludes at historic Hinkle Fieldhouse where she watches McCaffery's Butler team win its season opener. Fifth-grader Ellie Dillon and a friend—both wearing Clark shirts—wait more than a half hour after the game to catch Clark, who as she's leaving the gym with McCaffery stops to give them autographs. "It almost doesn't feel real," says Dillon moments after meeting Clark. "That that's actually her, standing right in front of you." ◻

TIME
Icon
OF THE Year
2024

Elton JOHN

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE/NEW YORK AND LONDON

JOHN PHOTOGRAPHED AT HIS HOME NEAR LONDON ON NOV. 20

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MILES ALDRIDGE FOR TIME

OMO

Elton John has no address. Visitors to his home are given three names: the name of a house, the name of a hill, and the name of a town, which is near Windsor, as in Windsor Castle, where King Charles III lives.

TERRY O'NEILL—ICONIC IMAGES

Admission is granted via a big iron gate that swings silently open to a crunchy driveway, a small turreted gatehouse, a pond with geese, hedgerows, wordless men with wheelbarrows and Wellingtons and, after a little walking, a three-story red-brick Georgian compound. From the outside it has the stately but understated air commonly associated with English gentry. One of the property's chief treasures is a really old oak tree.

This is not the Elton John most people know. That guy is loud. The glasses, the outfits, the sexuality, the concerts, the retail expenditure, the platform heels, the temper, the parties, and most of all the piano—all set permanently at fortissimo. John has been in showbiz for 60 years, and for 50 of those he has been a front man, inordinately and excessively famous. His triumphs, mistakes, strengths, weaknesses, wigs, and duck costumes have been in full and permanent plumage. The wealth and passions he became known for have not been those associated with aristocracy: they leaned more toward shopping than Chopin.

But these days the comparison to an English noble feels weirdly apt. John's married with two heirs. His philanthropic work is much admired. Some of his possessions—a selection from his impressive photograph collection—are currently on display at one of London's most highly regarded art institutions, the Victoria and Albert Museum. His library is full of trophies that attest to his prowess, an Emmy and multiple other awards crowded together on a small table with some ancient sculpture fragments. He has literally been knighted. From his garden, the current King's grandmother once remarked, you get a good view of the British monarchy's ancestral home.

John has owned Woodside, as the house is known, for nearly 50 years, but until the pandemic he did not spend much time in it. Most of his life was spent in hotel rooms, while he toured. Like many nobles, he found laundry an unfamiliar task. "It was the most embarrassing thing in my life when I went into [drug] treatment that I couldn't work a washing machine," says John during our first interview, conducted in a New York City hotel room in November, while his husband David Furnish lies on the bed and two publicists wait in the bathroom. "I thought, 'F-ck. Here you are at 43 years of age, and you can't work a washing machine. That shows you how you're f-cked up.'"

More than three decades later, at 77, he is doing much more than still standing in front of the top loader. Right now, he's dealing with damage to his right eye, which was previously the good one, that has rendered him almost blind, but you wouldn't know it to meet him. The candle that is Elton John has been inextinguishable, no matter how strong the wind. His 57 U.S. Top 40 hits were mostly released

"IF YOU DON'T LIKE PERFORMING, THEN DO SOMETHING ELSE," SAYS JOHN, SHOWN AT DODGER STADIUM IN 1975. "I LOVED IT."

during his wild-child youth, but he found a second act in writing songs for animated Disney movies, for which he won two Oscars, and a third in writing songs for Broadway musicals, for which he won a Tony. There's a whiff of fourth act about him as he moves into the mash-up phase of his career, lending his melodies—and some vocals—to a new generation of performers. It has been a mere 16 months since he had his last hit single, a collaboration with Britney Spears, who hadn't recorded music for five years.

This kind of longevity requires not just prodigious musical dexterity, and phenomenal luck, but stamina. Few can keep up with fame's sugar-daddy demands for long enough to get to the settling-down phase with their sanity, health, and friends and family intact. "When you're famous, there's like a court around you," says John. "People are vying for position, and the nearer you are to me, the more people will get jealous."

He has bested or evaded the four horsemen that cut down his generation's boldest names: drug addiction, AIDS, irrelevance, and suicide. Apart from Paul McCartney, who had a Top 10 single with a resurrected Beatles song in 2023, very few of John's contemporaries are still alive, let alone releasing new hits. The Rolling Stones still tour, but their last No. 1 was 40 years ago. John has also survived deep family dysfunction, tabloid fabrication, early hair loss, bulimia, and in the '80s, a brief marriage to a woman. And here's the key part: he has remained prolific.

Having performed 4,500-something concerts over half a century, he retired from touring at the end of 2023, but not from cultural output. *Elton John: Never Too Late,* the most recent documentary on his life, which compares his meteoric first five years of touring the U.S. with the final tour that ended in July last year, is now on Disney+. He has written the music for and co-produced two new musicals: *Tammy Faye* and *The Devil Wears Prada.* An auction of some of his many belongings in February brought in more than $20 million, twice the presale estimate. He has a podcast/radio show, *Rocket Hour,* which promotes young musicians. This year the 52-year-old song "Rocket Man" hit a billion streams on Spotify, while "Cold Heart," a 2021 track with Dua Lipa, drew a million listeners a day. "When Elton and David called me about the collaboration, for me, it was because of our friendship," says Lipa. "And of course, singing alongside one of my musical heroes was a no-brainer. His music has been able to soundtrack my life from the very beginning."

John's outrageous string of hits is now a list of global standards. "Do you know how many requests I get a day for the use of our songs on things like *America's Got Talent, The Voice,* or the silly show where they dress up as poodles?" says Bernie Taupin, John's longtime writing partner, who has provided the lyrics to most of his hits. "I don't think Bob Dylan gets a lot of requests for *The Masked Singer.*"

IN PERSON the glam-rock superstar is gentle, a little shy, and eager to please, and especially eager to make people laugh. While some frailties are apparent, he still has plenty of bounce. He favors comfy designer tracksuits and sneakers. He doesn't hear too well or walk with confidence. Corrective surgery a few years back made the glasses a mostly cosmetic choice, but a recent eye infection damaged the optic nerve in his right eye and it's taking a while to heal. His husband is determined to be optimistic about it. "I just think it's just gonna take time, right?" Furnish says.

It's the evening after opening night of *Tammy Faye,* the $22 million Broadway musical about the televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker, who came to embrace and be embraced by the gay community. John wrote the music. The reviews are out, and they are dismal. It will be just one day before the show's impending closure is announced. John is mostly philosophical. "It's a shame for everyone who put so much work in it," he says. "But that's what happens when you take a chance." He and Furnish chalk the failure up to the mood after the election of Donald Trump. "It's a fairly political piece of work," he says. "And with that you have to press somebody's buttons. The buttons we pressed last night with the critics weren't the right ones."

If John seems sanguine, it's perhaps because he's long been more interested in exploring what's next than stewing about his failures. His best-selling 2019 memoir *Me* and Furnish's 1995 documentary about him, *Tantrums & Tiaras,* reveal a willingness to let people see the less fabulous side of Elton John. "It was a bit like video therapy in a way," says Furnish. "It gave me a chance to go in with a camera, like a shield, and kind of confront and shine a light on things in his life that I thought were odd."

The documentary (which George Michael advised him to bury) captures him in full meltdown mode, insisting on one occasion that he will never make another music video because someone left a bag in a car, and on another instructing his private plane to leave the South of France as soon as possible and never return because a woman waved at him during a tennis lesson. (They stay.)

John still struggles with patience. "David can tell you that my fuse is very short, and the worst thing about my temper is that David is very rational about things and he'll explain," says John. "And I'll get even madder about it." When John met Furnish in 1993, at a dinner party a friend had organized at Woodside at John's request, Furnish was impressed with the star's warmth and lack of ego. But as they grew closer, he realized John, who had endured childhood under a distant and eventually absent father and an ill-tempered mother, was a people pleaser with self-esteem issues. "He was very, very shut down in terms of accepting love," says Furnish. "No one had ever asked him to do personal things like go for a walk together, those kind of joyful things."

John was one of the earliest celebrities to come out, in 1976, initially saying he was bisexual, when such an admission was deeply hazardous career-wise. After 31 years together, John and Furnish, who formerly worked in advertising, take their gay-icon status very seriously. They formed a civil partnership in December 2005, within weeks of its becoming legal to do so, and were married on the same day nine years later after the U.K.'s same-sex-marriage laws were passed.

Unlike many celebrity parents, they are sending their two boys, Zachary, 13, and Elijah, 11, to school locally, although Zachary just started boarding school. "We deliberately didn't homeschool our children because we want them to be their own people and to define life as they want to be defined," says Furnish, who is husband, helpmeet, and manager. He's the CEO of Rocket Entertainment, is listed as executive producer on the musicals, and is the co-director of the new documentary, which he brought to R.J. Cutler, who has also helmed docs about Martha Stewart and Billie Eilish.

Fatherhood, marriage, and sobriety have mellowed the superstar. As has self-knowledge. "I will flare up if I'm tired, if I'm exhausted, if I'm overwhelmed," says John. "I don't like having that temperament, but it's all usually done and dusted within five or 10 minutes." But impatience is also part of his gift, it seems. He likes to write fast—if he can't get a tune for the lyrics he's given in an hour or so, he moves on to new ones. "I know people think, 'Oh, God, he doesn't work that hard,'" says John. "But it's really effortless. If I get a lyric and I look at it, the song comes straight out."

'When you're famous, there's like a court around you. People are vying for position.'
—ELTON JOHN

Taupin wrote "Your Song," the duo's most commercially successful tune, over breakfast when he was 19 and living with John's family, sleeping in bunk beds in John's room. He guesses it took his roommate half an hour to create music for it. "We have a telepathy

ZACHARY AND ELIJAH, WHO WERE DELIVERED VIA A SURROGATE, WITH THEIR PARENTS AT WOODSIDE IN 2014

GARETH CATTERMOLE—ELTON JOHN AIDS FOUNDATION/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

between the two of us," says John of Taupin. "He seems to know what I want, and I seem to know what he wants. It's really unusual and it's very spooky." In the new documentary there's old footage where John explains how he scored a song Taupin wrote. "As soon as you see the word *ballerina,* you know it's not going to be fast, it's got to be gentle," the young star says, like it's the most obvious thing in the world. The song is "Tiny Dancer."

In some of rock 'n' roll's most formative years, 1970 to 1975, John released 13 albums, seven of which went platinum. He was the first artist ever to have an album debut at No. 1 on the American charts and is the only one ever to have had a Top 10 single in each of the past six decades. Even today, John's songs are inescapable—they're at every party, in every restaurant, in every airport, on every hold for an agent, at every karaoke night. Spears cited him as her favorite artist even before their duet gave her an unexpected hit song. "Elton's songs are perfectly, masterfully written songs, and that's what connects them to millions, billions of people," says Chappell Roan, whom John raves about and whose rapid rise to fame is reminiscent of John's early days.

Roan says he also helped her learn to trust her instincts. "The advice he gave me was that the songs will come," says Roan. He told her that after his first album blew up, he had no songs lined up. "He thought that he wouldn't have the ideas, but they were absolutely there. He just had to let them come to him. So that's a good reminder." As well as being a guru for young performers, John has restored the careers of older musicians who had lost faith in themselves. His work with John Lennon gave the Beatles legend a No. 1 hit. And he rescued one of his idols, Leon Russell, from obscurity with an album they made together in 2011.

Rocket Hour is mostly just him playing music and telling the young artists how much he adores them. The people he interviews look bewildered to be so feted, like they got a FaceTime about their science project from Albert Einstein. "Elton's impact cannot be overstated, and even now, his continued effort to make a better future for young LGBTQ+ artists is so felt," wrote Allison Ponthier, one of the artists he has featured, on social media.

For Taupin, John's enduring relevance is a validation. "What people didn't realize in the '70s and '80s and '90s, but I think they realize now, is that he's one of the best f-cking piano players on the planet," he says. "There are a lot of people that have great catalogs and great songs, but I don't think anybody of our peers has songs that are so varied." Cutler, the documentary's other co-director, calls him "Mozartian in his prodigious gifts." In his youth, Cutler forged multiple record vouchers to win a ticket to John's 1974 concert at Madison Square Garden. "It comes out of him," says Cutler, trying to describe John's artistry. "It emanates from him, like it's a gift from the heavens."

MUSIC WAS ALWAYS the easiest part of John's life. Words—and relationships—not so much. A fledgling music producer at Liberty Records was so unimpressed with young Reginald Dwight's songs during an audition that he sent him packing, handing him an envelope of lyrics mailed in by a 17-year-old chicken farmer from Lincolnshire as he left. It's one of the greatest origin stories in rock history. The unlikely duo of John and Taupin churned out hits in much the same way chickens make eggs, often and without fuss. Except these eggs frequently turned platinum.

While the songs were appealing, it was John's performance style that captivated American critics on his first tour in the States in 1970. He had developed an approach to the piano that combined the merriness of Winifred Atwell with the force of Jerry Lee Lewis and the showmanship of Little Richard, all to

a rock beat. The costumes and keyboard antics were brazen, but the stories the songs told and harmonies they used were mostly tender. "I think there's always a new generation that cling on to the things they say," says Taupin.

Somewhere around 1974, at the peak of his productivity, John was introduced to cocaine by his ex-lover and then manager John Reid. He took to it with the avidity he applies to most of his pursuits. At first he found it freed him of his crippling shyness, but eventually it took over. "You make terrible decisions on drugs," he says. "I wanted love so badly, I'd just take hostages. I'd see someone I liked and spend three or four months together, and then they would resent me because they had nothing in their life apart from me. It really upsets me, thinking back on how many people I probably hurt."

As John became increasingly dependent on drugs, the music got worse. "I was terrified for him. It was absolutely horrible," says Taupin. He had some hits—"I'm Still Standing," interestingly, came out of this period—but they were rarer. "A lot of the work that we did in the times when he was at his worst wasn't the best of both of us," says Taupin, who says watching John's decline made him reform his own heavy drug use. "I wasn't able to creatively invest any time in writing material that related to him until he actually found himself, and then it was easier for me to reflect upon it."

John now divides his life into pre- and post-sober periods. He has helped many people kick drugs and has offered to help many more. He is Eminem's sponsor. He orchestrated English pop star Robbie Williams' first stint in rehab. He tried, without success, to help George Michael. "It's tough to tell someone that they're being an a--hole, and it's tough to hear," he says. "Eventually I made the choice to admit that I'm being an a--hole." Those struggles have made him doubt the wisdom of legal weed. "I maintain that it's addictive. It leads to other drugs. And when you're stoned—and I've been stoned—you don't think normally," he says. "Legalizing marijuana in America and Canada is one of the greatest mistakes of all time."

Asked if he feels the same way about alcohol, he pauses, exhales, and asks Furnish for help. His husband, who is also sober and has already prevented the star from oversharing once during the interview, sits up on the bed and offers a balanced answer, suggesting that

MILESTONES ON YELLOW BRICK ROAD

▸ JOHN'S GIFT SHOWED UP EARLY; AS A TWEEN HE DID CLASSES AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

▲ UNDER JOHN'S OWNERSHIP, WATFORD FC SOCCER TEAM ROSE FROM OBSCURITY TO THE FA CUP FINAL

▼ JOHN SAYS MEETING RYAN WHITE, SHOWN AT AN AIDS GALA IN 1988, "PROMPTED ME TO GET SOBER"

TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: CHILDHOOD: ROCKET ENTERTAINMENT, TROUBADOUR: ED CARAEFF—ICONIC IMAGES, TAUPIN: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, LENNON: STEVE MORLEY—REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE ROW, FROM LEFT: WATFORD: MICHAEL PUTLAND—GETTY IMAGES;

JOHN'S ANTICS WOWED GUESTS AT HIS FIRST GIG AT THE TROUBADOUR IN L.A. IN 1970

BERNIE TAUPIN AND JOHN, PICTURED IN 1971, HAVE WRITTEN 29 TOP 10 HITS

TO SETTLE A BET, JOHN LENNON WAS A SURPRISE GUEST AT A 1974 CONCERT, HIS LAST MAJOR SHOW

JOHN, ON *THE MUPPET SHOW* IN 1974, WAS ONE OF THE MODELS FOR DR. TEETH

"I MISS HIM SO MUCH," SAYS JOHN OF GEORGE MICHAEL. "SUCH A KIND PERSON."

ELABORATE AND COMICAL STAGE LOOKS, LIKE THIS PURPLE SHAG WIG IN SYDNEY IN 1986, WERE PART OF JOHN'S APPEAL

JOHN WON HIS FIRST OF TWO OSCARS FOR *THE LION KING* SONG "CAN YOU FEEL THE LOVE TONIGHT" IN 1994

WEEKS BEFORE HER DEATH IN 1997, PRINCESS DIANA WENT TO GIANNI VERSACE'S FUNERAL WITH JOHN AND FURNISH

"I MEAN, HE'S ONE OF THE ORIGINAL QUEENS," SAYS SINGER CHAPPELL ROAN, WITH JOHN IN AUGUST

MUPPET SHOW: TV TIMES/FUTURE PUBLISHING/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL: DAVE HOGAN—HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; SYDNEY: BOB KING—REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT: WHITE: L. COHEN—WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES, OSCARS: JIM SMEAL—RON GALELLA COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES, PRINCESS DIANA: GERARD JULIEN—AFP/GETTY IMAGES, ROAN: DAVID FURNISH

while alcohol is part of the fabric of society, there are studies that find it's much less healthy than people believe it to be.

Survival, as the poet Christian Wiman has said, is a style. You have to be around long enough to really make a dent on the culture. John, who has taken a half-hearted bid at ending his life three times, thinks there were three things that saved him from the fates that took so many of his peers: Watford FC, a soccer club local to where he grew up that he bought and took to the Premier League; Alcoholics Anonymous; and a hemophiliac teenager from Indiana named Ryan White. At the club he met people who cared more about soccer than his fame, AA's methods helped him deal with his multiple addictions, and White, who contracted HIV from a tainted blood transfusion in the early days of the AIDS crisis and was shunned by his school and neighbors, showed him how selfishly he was living.

John heard about White when the teen was invited to an AIDS benefit and said on a TV news program that the person he was most looking forward to meeting was the rock star. John saw the interview and called the family. White, who was given six months to live when he got his diagnosis, survived five years and spent much of it trying to educate people about AIDS. John kept in touch and helped the family out when they needed it. Eventually he flew them to a concert in California. "Elton wasn't afraid to be around us and just brought so much joy," says Jeanne White Ginder, Ryan's mother. "It took us off all the negativity we were facing at home."

White died on April 8, 1990, at 18. John was at the hospital with him. "It all came to a climax, really, at the Ryan White funeral in Indianapolis—a really sad and emotional week—and I came back to the hotel thinking I'm just so out of line," John says. "It was a shock to see how far down the scale of humanity I'd fallen." Six months later he went into rehab. Two years later he started the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF), of which Furnish is now the chairman. "We could end AIDS tomorrow if every person knew their HIV status and had access to treatment," says Furnish.

In 2022, President Joe Biden surprised John with the National Humanities Medal, calling him "an enduring icon and advocate with absolute courage, who found purpose to challenge convention, shatter stigma, and advance the simple truth that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect." John and Furnish are particularly proud of the EJAF-funded program that allows people to take HIV tests at Walmart, without going to a doctor. They believe that the U.N.'s goal of ending new AIDS cases by 2030 is achievable, even with an incoming U.S. Administration whose proposed health czar has suggested, contrary to evidence, that AIDS is not caused by a virus.

Looking back on that news program that first brought John into their lives, White Ginder recalls how horrified she was that her son had not talked up the event's sponsor Elizabeth Taylor. "I said, 'Ryan, why did you mention Elton John?'" she says. "And he said, 'Because he's not afraid to be different.'"

AS FURNISH AND JOHN sit on floral couches next to a gas fireplace in Woodside and talk about the demands and benefits of being Elton John, it is clear that the rock star gave up touring reluctantly. ("Elton used to say, 'I want to die onstage,'" says Furnish. "It never made me particularly happy.") But what he has now is what he has always wanted: a home. Yes, it's one where a stunning young man serves hot beverages

ROCKET MAN BY THE NUMBERS

1
DIAMOND SINGLE ("SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY YOU LOOK TONIGHT/ CANDLE IN THE WIND 1997")

71
SONGS TO HAVE APPEARED ON THE *BILLBOARD* HOT 100

300 MILLION+
RECORDS SOLD WORLDWIDE

35
GRAMMY NOMS—WITH 5 WINS; HE'S AN EGOT WITH A TONY, 2 OSCARS, AND AN EMMY

$2 BILLION+
GROSSES FOR *THE LION KING*, HIGHEST-EARNING BROADWAY MUSICAL OF ALL TIME

$600 MILLION
FUNDS RAISED BY ELTON JOHN AIDS FOUNDATION

BEN GIBSON—ROCKET ENTERTAINMENT

"I DIDN'T WANT TO FADE INTO THE TWILIGHT," SAYS JOHN, PICTURED IN L.A. IN 2022. "I WANTED TO FADE INTO THE SUNLIGHT. AND WE DID."

and where artworks by Damien Hirst and Andy Warhol share space with a mannequin covered in what look like jelly beans. But the bougie-candle-scented living room is also strewn with family photos. As with so many who resisted the pulls of fatherhood until late in life, John's chosen style of parenting is gushy. "On my gravestone," he tells me in our New York City interview, "all I want it to say is 'He was a great dad.'"

There were casualties to creating this new life, the biggest of which was his relationship with his mother, to whom he had been very close. "She meant a lot to me, but my success changed her," he says. He continued to support her financially, but she disapproved of Furnish. "She was probably one of the biggest liars I've ever met," says John. "But that's because she was a sociopath, and I got to understand it." The two fought publicly; she hired an Elton John impersonator for her 90th birthday. Her son and his spouse were not invited, but reporters were. "I rang her up the next day to wish her a happy birthday. I said, 'How did it go?'" John recalls. "And she said, 'It was great. He's as good as you are.'"

Perhaps it's age or his relationship with Furnish (or distance from his mother, who died in 2017), but he has grown slightly more comfortable with himself. Slightly. His distaste for being on video, for instance, persists. "Music videos should be made by good-looking people like Harry Styles," says John. "I'm not very good at looking at myself. I don't think you ever lose that body consciousness. I just think it stays with you forever. But I am much better." He especially dislikes TV and has turned down invitations to be a judge on the TV talent shows that request his music so often. "Being on TV all the time kills your career, kills your vibe, kills your charisma totally," he says.

He would prefer to spend his time discovering. "I've never lost the excitement of buying a new record, a new book, a new photograph," he says, noting that if he had to choose between never playing music again and never listening to it again, he'd opt to keep listening. "I just think that's kept me going," he says. But he is beginning to think a bit about what lies beyond. "I don't really believe in the biblical God too much, but I have faith," says John. "My higher power has been looking after me all my life; he's got me through drugs, he's got me through depression, he's got me through loneliness, and he got me sober. He's been there all the time, I think. I just didn't acknowledge him."

Like many megastars, John feels that he was somehow chosen to be as famous as he is, because he could withstand the burdens it brings. Asked if he'd wish his talent on his sons, if it also came with the drawbacks of stardom, he offers an emphatic no. "I've lived an incredible life, but it's been a hell of a life, and it's been a slog," he says. "I wouldn't want that amount of pressure on them." Icon status is great, but as he learned over his many decades in the spotlight, there's more to life than rock 'n' roll. "If people remember that we tried to change the world a little bit, we were kind, we tried to help people," that would be enough of a legacy for him, says John. "And then, apart from that, there was the music." —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN

'I don't really believe in the biblical God too much, but I have faith.'
—ELTON JOHN

CHINA WATCH
PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中国日報

Villages make a world of difference

Seven additions to UN list reflect China's commitment to vitalizing rural areas through tourism

BY CHINA DAILY

Seven villages in China were recognized among the Best Tourism Villages 2024 by the United Nations World Tourism Organization at its 122nd session of the Executive Council in Cartagena, Colombia, on Nov. 15. The villages selected for their blend of cultural preservation and sustainable tourism were: Azheke, Yunnan province; Guanyang, Fujian province; Shibadong, Hunan province; Taoping, Sichuan province; Xiaogang, Anhui province; Xitou, Zhejiang province; and Yandunjiao, Shandong province.

The villages represent a cross-section of China's vast rural terrain and its deep cultural reservoir, stretching from the highlands and the plains of central China to the coastal areas of the east.

The Best Tourism Villages program, established in 2021, honors destinations using tourism as a vehicle to preserve landscape, cultural practices and ecological and culinary diversity. With this year's additions China has 15 villages on the list, reflecting the country's commitment to preserving rural heritage.

Horizon of prosperity

Over the past 10 years, Shibadong village, in the Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture of Hunan province, has undergone a remarkable transformation.

Once isolated and impoverished, it has evolved into a modern community boasting improved infrastructure, thriving tourism and a pristine environment, serving as a landmark in China's effort to eradicate poverty.

Perched atop mountains, Shibadong is known for its superb vistas, verdant landscapes, traditional wooden dwellings and clean air, making it a sought-after destination among tourists.

The village, home to the Miao ethnic group, has preserved its ancient charm while refurbishing ancestral homes, restoring ancient pathways and introducing cultural experiences such as Miao embroidery workshops and homestays to engage visitors in folk activities.

Xiaogang village in Fengyang county, Anhui province.

Harvest of success

Xiaogang village, in Fengyang county, Anhui province, draws tourists for its idyllic scenery, agriculture, rural reform and folk customs.

They can also learn about the profound changes China has undergone by exploring the village where the country's rural reform began more than 40 years ago.

A rural homestay establishment features a group of thatched cottages with earthen walls and threshing floors where crops are sun-dried, exhibiting farming tools that aim to re-create scenes of the village dating back to the 1980s.

Inheritors demonstrate intangible cultural heritage, such as Fengyang flower-drum ballads and paper-cutting, providing lessons to tourists in workshops. Visitors can also learn about traditional methods of making liquor and vinegar in breweries and buy some as souvenirs.

Buildings stand strong

Time appears to stand still in tranquil Guanyang village, nestled among rolling green mountains in Nanjing county, Zhangzhou, Fujian province.

At the foot of the peaks, lush fields stretch toward a winding creek, where eight ancient banyan trees form a natural canopy.

This village, 700 years old, has become a portal to the past, drawing nearly 3 million visitors a year.

"The *tulou*, or earthen buildings, are Guanyang's most distinctive cultural treasure," said Zhang Haitao, head of the Nanjing bureau of culture, sports and tourism. "These

Above: Cottages atop rice terraces in Azheke village in Yuanyang county, Yunnan province.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Left: A view of Shibadong village in the Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture, Hunan province.

Yandunjiao village in Rongcheng, Shandong province, is a national nature reserve for swans.

Guanyang village in Nanjing county, Fujian province, draws visitors with its idyllic scenery.

Intricate embroidery is a heritage of the Qiang ethnic group in Taoping village, Lixian county, Sichuan province.

structures are both intricate and rustic."

In recent years the village has found new ways to keep its traditions alive, reviving the interiors of these ancient buildings and creating public spaces that encourage community gathering. New ventures, including *tulou* homestays, farm-to-table dining and *tulou*-inspired cafes, have taken root, catering to travelers' growing appetite for cultural immersion.

A winter haven for swans

With thousands of whooper swans enjoying their winter time at the fishing village of Yandunjiao in Rongcheng, Shandong province, Yu Haiyang has little time to appreciate the graceful scene as he greets his homestay guests.

Under the seaweed-thatched roof, Yu, 35, aims to offer his guests an authentic and heartfelt experience, serving homemade meals crafted from local ingredients and providing a respite from urban living.

"Winter is the peak season for tourists, who come to enjoy the harmonious scene between humans and swans," Yu said.

Yandunjiao, 400 years old, has abundant marine resources and a temperate climate that offers a cozy winter haven for whooper swans. Tens of thousands of them migrate from Siberia to the village to spend the winter, adding vibrancy to the bleak season. It is a national nature reserve for swans and has become a location of choice for bird-watchers.

Preserving Qiang heritage

Located in a picturesque valley east of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Taoping village in Lixian county, Aba Tibetan-Qiang autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province, is a land of idyllic beauty that boasts the heritage of one of China's oldest ethnic groups, the Qiang.

The village has one of the best-preserved ancient Qiang architectural complexes dating back 2,000 years. The complex is formed by 98 interconnected stone houses and two nine-story watchtowers.

Within the complex, 13 criss-crossing alleys form a network of roads. Hidden among them are eight entrances and exits, creating a maze-like stone fortress. The complex belongs to 1,258 Qiang people.

Artists keep kilns burning

Tucked away in the mountainous region of Longquan, Zhejiang province, Xitou village is a place steeped in a millennium-long tradition of celadon porcelain making. Here families have protected and handed down their artisanal techniques through generations, preserving a cultural heritage that continues to define the village.

The village, with a history of 1,400 years, boasts seven ancient kilns still in use, a testament to its rich porcelain culture. The largest is a snake-shaped kiln nestled along a mountain. In 2009 the traditional wood-fired technique of Longquan celadon porcelain was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

A kiln opening ceremony in Xitou village in Longquan, Zhejiang province.

Many artisans have set up porcelain studios, opened guesthouses and organized celadon porcelain-related cultural activities in the village to entertain visitors.

Where forests flourish

Surrounded by cascading rice terraces and verdant greenery, more than 60 "mushroom cottages" with brick walls and thatched roofs are regarded by experts as the best-preserved cluster of Hani ethnic group traditional architecture in Yuanyang county, Yunnan province.

For more than 160 years the village has been home to the Hani ethnic group. Its name, Azheke, meaning "a place where bamboo forests flourish", perfectly reflects its lush vegetation.

Spanning 353 acres with more than 60 households, the village features a rich, diverse and layered landscape, with the coexistence of forests, water systems, houses and rice terraces.

Orchestra makes China debut

BY CHEN NAN

The Tianjin Juilliard Orchestra embarked on its first ever China tour, presenting concerts at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Nov. 20.

The Tianjin Juilliard Orchestra was established in 2020, and plans for a tour soon began. It is the first overseas campus of the Juilliard School in New York, and the tour is part of celebrations for the fifth anniversary of the Tianjin orchestra's founding.

The orchestra is made up of students from two graduating classes, meaning that every September it experiences a big turnover, with half its members changing each year. It is thus an orchestra that never ages, says He Wei, chief executive and artistic director of the school.

Taysia Petersen, 23, says she completed her undergraduate studies in the United States before coming to China to study. She is the principal oboist on the tour. "This was my first time participating in an orchestra tour. Performing in different cities and concert halls was a new experience for me, and Tianjin Juilliard has created many unprecedented opportunities for us."

The Tianjin school has a series of other important events to mark its fifth anniversary. In January its annual Festival Connect will focus on one of the most revolutionary composers of the 20th century, the French-American composer Edgard Varese. In February the faculty will travel to New York to collaborate with colleagues on the New York campus for a faculty concert.

"As a cooperative educational institution between China and the U.S., cultural exchange is embedded in the DNA of the school," He says.

The Tianjin Juilliard Orchestra in concert on Oct. 20. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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7. INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

8. EMILIA PÉREZ

5. THE LIGHT EATERS

9. THINGS FELL APART

5. BRAT, CHARLI XCX

THE ART THAT ENTERTAINED, MOVED, AND INSPIRED US IN 2024

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NATALIE NELSON FOR TIME

TV SHOWS

BY JUDY BERMAN

1. SHOGUN

An artistic triumph. A record-breaking 18 Emmy wins. An all-time viewership high for FX. Two more seasons in development for a title that was planned as a limited series. By every measure, *Shogun* is the TV success story of 2024. It wasn't a foregone conclusion that a $200 million bet—on a largely Japanese-language production that was also the second high-profile adaptation of James Clavell's 1975 best seller about a 17th century English sailor (Cosmo Jarvis) who washes up in Japan and finds himself at the mercy of a politically isolated feudal lord (Hiroyuki Sanada)—was going to pay off. But, at a time when American audiences are assumed to have fragmented along demographic and partisan lines, creators Justin Marks and Rachel Kondo scored a megahit by offering something precious to every kind of viewer: heroism, history, romance, magnificent performances, lush visuals. As streamers increasingly turn away from ambitious projects, in their desperation to get out of the red, I hope *Shogun* will resonate as a reminder that fortune favors the bold. (FX)

2. INDUSTRY

Industry has always been better than its reputation as that show where young finance employees in London snort coke, sleep around, and take reckless risks with staggering sums of money. (Not that that's technically incorrect.) But with this year's third season, Mickey Down and Konrad Kay's propulsive drama became one of TV's shrewdest commentaries on the times in which we're living. Opening with the calamitous IPO of a green-energy startup managed by the series' fictional banking giant, Pierpoint & Co., the season took a scalpel to socially conscious capitalism. At the same time, it zoomed in on some of its most compelling characters: troubled heiress Yasmin (Marisa Abela), cutthroat company man Eric (Ken Leung), toxic striver Rishi (Sagar Radia). Taken together, these arcs and the overarching plot demonstrate how, at a place like Pierpoint, when self-interest conflicts with decency, selfishness always wins. (HBO)

3. SAY NOTHING

What happened to Jean McConville, the widowed mother of 10 who vanished in 1972 after being abducted from her Belfast home? This question ostensibly drives FX's adaptation of the acclaimed nonfiction book by Patrick Radden Keefe. But *Say Nothing* barely resembles the typical true-crime drama. Morally astute, rich in layered characters and insightful performances, and perceptive about how a person's morals evolve with age, the series filters four decades of the Troubles through the experience of Dolours Price (Lola Petticrew), an IRA agitator who spent her later life (in which she's played by Maxine Peake) haunted by her extremist youth. At its core, the show is really asking: Who benefits from political violence, and who becomes its collateral damage? (FX)

4. PENELOPE

It says nothing good about the state of TV that filmmaker and actor Mark Duplass, who created *Penelope* with Mel Eslyn, pitched the series to studios but wound up producing it independently when none would bite. Thankfully, Netflix did license the final product—a dreamlike half-hour drama that follows a teenage girl, played by a magnetic Megan Stott, who abruptly leaves home to rough it in Cascade National Forest. Rendered in vibrant shades of green and generous with moments of silence, Penelope's journey is best understood as a spiritual pilgrimage. Like Thoreau, she goes to the woods to live deliberately. And by immersing us in its heroine's search for meaning, the show invites our introspection as well. (Netflix)

5. FANTASMAS

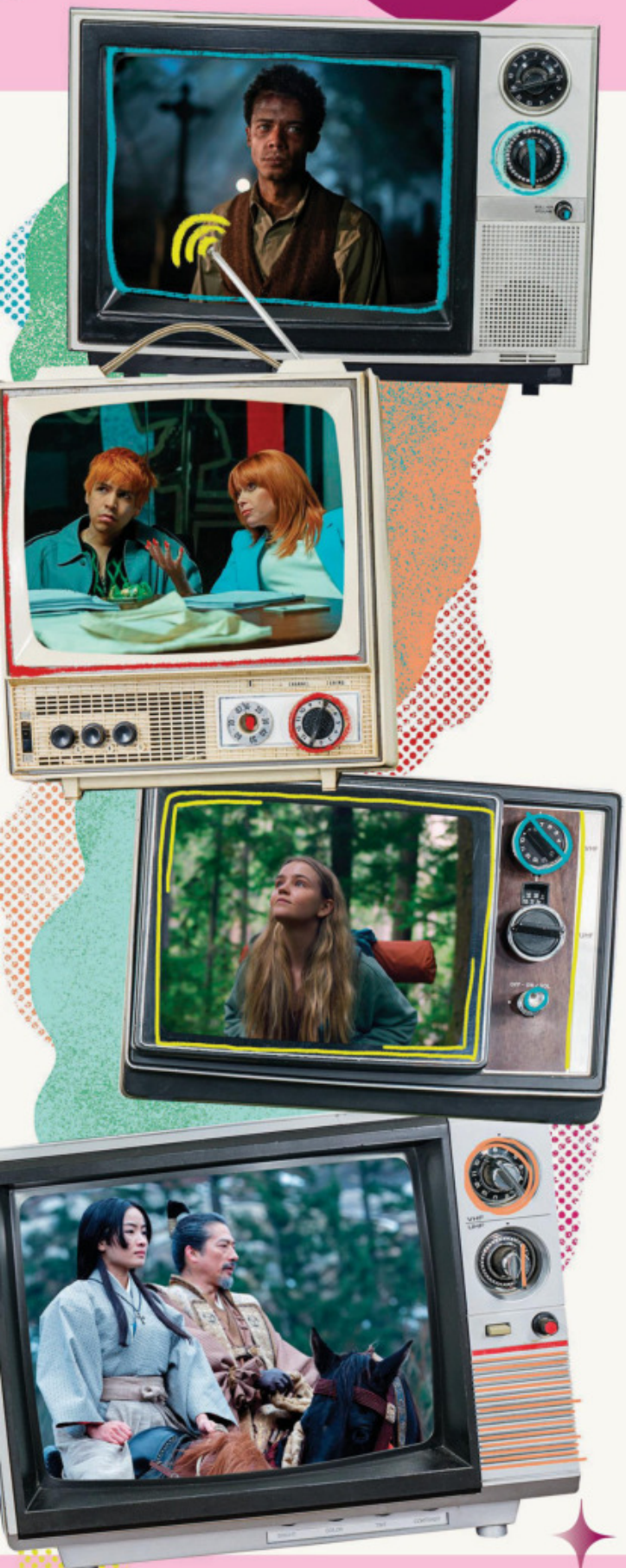
When reality feels like a fever dream, surreal stories can hit harder than realism. Hence the haunting humor of *Fantasmas,* an unconventional sketch comedy about art and survival from the infinite imagination of Julio Torres *(Los Espookys, Problemista).* The show's fantastical vignettes feature a delightful guest-star lineup: Tilda Swinton, Steve Buscemi, executive producer Emma Stone. But what has stuck with me is the frame narrative starring Torres as Julio, a creative wunderkind living in an alternate-universe New York. When a health scare and landlord trouble throw his life into precarity, Julio's plight is exacerbated by his refusal to obtain an invasive new form of ID called Proof of Existence. His only other option is to earn enough money through selling dumb TV-show ideas about his gay and Latino identities to live on his own terms. Absurd though it is, his predicament makes perfect sense as a metaphor for the artist's endless battle against bureaucracy, mediocrity, and poverty—not to mention a sharp commentary on the current TV landscape. (HBO)

6. SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE

For a few years, at the very peak of Peak TV, you couldn't browse a streaming-service menu without stumbling upon a witty, wise, alternately warm and wry slice-of-life comedy whose modest scale belied its universal insight. One of the last left standing—until its Dec. 8 finale—was *Somebody Somewhere,* which cast New York alt-cabaret doyenne Bridget Everett as a single, unmoored, middle-aged woman in small-town Kansas. A celebration of friendships that become chosen families and intrafamilial feuds that resolve into friendships, it illustrates how finding community can change a person's life. The show's third and final season, which finds Everett's Sam flirting with romance as her pals settle down with partners of their own, poignantly captures the common fear that everyone in your life is moving forward while you stay stuck in the same stunted place. (HBO)

7. INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

Interview With the Vampire, the flagship title in AMC's Anne Rice franchise, is the rare reboot with something new to offer. What began as the warped saga of conflicted vampire Louis (Jacob Anderson)



and his abusive but devoted maker, Lestat (Sam Reid), evolved, in this year's second season, into TV's most bizarre love triangle, as we got to know Louis' mysteriously powerful current beau (Assad Zaman). A capital-R Romantic spirit suffuses creator Rolin Jones' production, which feels emotionally immersive in ways that so much recent entertainment for adults is not. (AMC)

8. THE SYMPATHIZER

Yes, it casts one of the biggest movie stars in the world, Robert Downey Jr., in a quadruple role that collectively represents white supremacy. And yes, he's great. But what's really remarkable about Park Chan-wook's wild, globe-spanning, manically referential, simultaneously hilarious and gutting adaptation of the Pulitzer-winning novel by Viet Thanh Nguyen is its insight into the Vietnam War, a cataclysm that has shaped identities both Vietnamese and American. Grounded in the chronically ambivalent perspective of the Captain (a note-perfect Hoa Xuande), *The Sympathizer* spans continents as it reckons with what it means to commit to a cause and how a society survives colonialism, war, and ideological schism. (HBO)

9. BABY REINDEER

No one was betting on a trauma-driven dramedy adapted from an unknown Scottish creator's autobiographical one-man show to become Netflix's big 2024 breakout. But such is the magic of Netflix, which through a unique combination of algorithmic wizardry and word-of-mouth virality has the power to spawn global hits nobody saw coming. Now the show's mastermind and star, Richard Gadd, is a household name with an armload of awards and an HBO series in the works. It couldn't have happened to a more compelling voice. Nominally a crime drama that fictionalizes his ordeal with a female stalker (Jessica Gunning), his sui generis series is really a journey into a wounded psyche, dissecting everything from Gadd's self-involvement to his history with a sexually abusive mentor to his inability to commit to a trans woman (Nava Mau) who is too good for him. Also: it's funny. (Netflix)

10. PACHINKO

In its superior second season, this epic adaptation of Min Jin Lee's novel about a Korean family in the 20th century reaches the book's powerful middle chapters, which trace its heroine Sunja's (Minha Kim) conflicted relationship with her secret lover turned guardian angel, Mr. Koh (Lee Min-ho), during World War II. Creator Soo Hugh weaves together the family's struggles with a fresh perspective on a conflict that made Korean immigrants collateral damage of their occupier's aggression, while deepening the first season's depiction of her grandson Solomon (Jin Ha) wrestling with his identity, history, ambition, and future two generations later. A tale that pits survival against self-sacrifice and legacy against self-determination, *Pachinko* doesn't just do justice to the contemporary classic it's based on; it forges new connections and finds new revelations. (Apple TV+)

FROM TOP: SOURCE IMAGES: INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE: LARRY HORRICKS—AMC; FANTASMAS: ATSUSHI NISHIJIMA—HBO; PENELOPE: NATHAN M. MILLER; SHOGUN: KATIE YU—FX

MOVIES

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

1. BABYGIRL

If you read only the synopsis of *Babygirl* before seeing it, you might imagine it's an erotic age-gap thriller about the workplace power dynamic between men and women. That's part of it, sure. But Halina Reijn's exuberant third feature goes deeper than that, exploring the ways in which human beings—especially women—often want things they don't know how to ask for. Nicole Kidman gives a live-wire performance as Romy, a buttoned-up executive who falls under the spell of a seductive intern (Harris Dickinson, a bedroom murmur in human form). There's so much we don't know about desire, particularly in perimenopausal and menopausal women, and almost nobody wants to talk about it—except Reijn. The movie's centerpiece, built around George Michael's "Father Figure," is one of the most rapturous sequences put to film this year, a celebration of what it means to finally, or at least temporarily, know yourself.

2. ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT

Everywhere you look, there are women living on their own, making their lives work in spite of long hours at their jobs, thwarted love, loneliness. In Payal Kapadia's gorgeous study of friendship and the tensions that sometimes come with it, three women in modern Mumbai chart their own bumpy roads: Prabha (Kani Kusruti), a nurse, is married, but she hasn't heard from her absentee husband in years. Fellow nurse Anu (Divya Prabha) is secretly involved with a Muslim man, which she must hide from her Hindu family—and just about everybody—at all costs. And Parvaty (Chhaya Kadam) is an older hospital worker who loses her home because the property's paperwork is in her late husband's name. All of these women have come from small villages to work, to make money, to do things their own way. Kapadia captures the texture of their lives, as well as the glittery, gritty poetry of the city around them.

3. THE SEED OF THE SACRED FIG

What happens when a country becomes desperate to control women, believing it has every right to do so? Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof's shattering film offers one possible answer. A loyal government servant, Missagh Zareh's Iman, has just been promoted to the position of investigating judge, a huge move up for him, his wife Najmeh (Soheila Golestani), and their two teenage daughters, Rezvan (Mahsa Rostami) and Sana (Setareh Maleki). This is what you'd call a close, loving family. But Rezvan and Sana come to see the insidiousness of the comfortable lives their father's job has accorded them; their awareness ignites a kind of explosion. Rasoulof fled Iran last spring—just before this film was to make its premiere at Cannes—after the Islamic Republic, displeased with the content of his films, handed him an eight-year prison sentence. This film, made in the aftermath of Mahsa Amini's 2022 death in police custody after she was arrested for how she wore her hijab, is a thriller, a family drama, and a horror story. But mostly, it's an invocation to fight back.

4. ANORA

Sean Baker's story of an effervescent young sex worker, Ani (Mikey Madison), who meets and falls for the rambunctious son of a Russian oligarch, spoiled rich kid Ivan (Mark Eydelshteyn), is part romantic comedy, part fractured fairy tale—one that focuses on what happens after the golden coach turns back into a pumpkin. That's the magic of writer-director Baker, a workaday humanist whose quiet generosity sneaks up on you. And Madison's performance, both ebullient and piercing, is one of the year's finest.

5. A COMPLETE UNKNOWN

James Mangold's scrappy patchwork portrait of Bob Dylan's early years in New York isn't a biopic. It's a Dylan cover, an interpretation of real events filtered through memory, myth, and pure fabrication. But can you, should you, fact-check a ballad? Timothée Chalamet slouches through the movie with inquisitive, appraising eyes. Yet this film really belongs to the women, Monica Barbaro as superfamous folk singer Joan Baez and Elle Fanning as Sylvie Russo, based on Suze Rotolo, an early Dylan muse but also a shrewd chronicler of the scene. These are women living in the real world. Meanwhile, the man himself sits on a rumpled bed, writing one of the world's greatest protest songs in his underpants. As the title suggests, you'll know less about the real Bob Dylan coming out of *A Complete Unknown* than you did going in. But do you think the actual Bob (who gave Mangold notes on the script) considers knowing everything about everything a worthy goal? There's a song that goes, "He not busy being born …" You probably know the rest.

6. HARD TRUTHS

Mike Leigh is the closest we've got to a modern Dickens, a filmmaker whose portrayals of complex, difficult, often

FROM LEFT: SOURCE IMAGES: A COMPLETE UNKNOWN: COURTESY SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES; THE SEED OF THE SACRED FIG: CINETIC MEDIA; EMILIA PÉREZ: PATHÉ; ANORA: NEON; BABYGIRL: A24

unlikable people come to feel like family portraits: they may make us cringe, but we can see bits of ourselves there too. Marianne Jean-Baptiste, so extraordinary in Leigh's 1996 *Secrets & Lies,* plays Pansy, a woman who appears to be held together by her anger. She bristles with bitterness every minute; no one, including her husband (David Webber) and son (Tuwaine Barrett) can stand to be around her for long. Jean-Baptiste softens nothing about Pansy; her performance is as raw as a bundle of thorns, fierce and uncompromising. We never find out what makes Pansy the way she is, and there's no comforting redemption arc. Still, somehow, we reach out to her in her unnamable pain. Leigh doesn't give up on her, and neither can we.

7. GREEN BORDER

A serious-minded film about the plight of refugees trying to cross into Europe from the Middle East and Africa is a tough sell. But Agnieszka Holland's film, though at times hard to watch, is so beautifully made, and so attuned to all the things we respond to as humans who care about art's entwinement with real life, that it's ultimately more joyful than dispiriting. Sometimes movies about difficult subjects end up being such brutal experiences you almost wish you hadn't seen them. *Green Border* is the opposite: it's likely to leave you feeling emboldened and galvanized, if also a little sadder and wiser.

8. EMILIA PÉREZ

In Jacques Audiard's extravagantly emotional opera *Emilia Pérez,* Zoe Saldaña plays Rita, a disillusioned lawyer working in Mexico, who's asked to undertake a strange task: a ruthless drug lord, Manitas, wants to transition to living as a woman and needs Rita to arrange both the surgery and subsequent disappearance. She pulls it off, and thinks she's through with the job. But the woman Manitas has become, now named Emilia Pérez (both roles are played by the fantastic Spanish actress Karla Sofía Gascón), re-emerges, asking Rita's help in righting some of her past wrongs. *Emilia Pérez* is great fun. But it's also about personal transformation as a beginning, not an end, an exhortation to leave the world in better shape than you found it. It's a film with an open heart, arriving at a time when so many human hearts seem to have shut down.

9. FLOW

This wordless animated wonder from Latvia, directed by Gints Zilbalodis, follows a nameless black cat as he travels across a flooded world, in a boat shared by a stalwart capybara, a clumsy-friendly dog, an opportunistic lemur, and a stately secretary bird. Elegant and spare, this is an environmental parable that doesn't hammer away at its message. Instead, it gently reminds us that the beauty of this world is worth preserving.

10. DOGMAN

French filmmaker Luc Besson has long specialized in fantastic flights of fantasy and shockeroo violence. But he's never made a film as tender as *DogMan.* Caleb Landry Jones' Douglas is a wounded human being, a survivor of childhood abuse, who finds solace in living with his community of dogs. *DogMan* is about the families we choose, sometimes more sustaining than the ones we're born into. It's also the perfect movie for those days you're convinced that dogs are better than people—even if that's every day.

BOOKS

BY ANNABEL GUTTERMAN

FICTION

1. JAMES

Percival Everett's reimagining of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* which won a National Book Award, is a sweeping story centering on Jim, the enslaved sidekick in Mark Twain's classic adventure tale. Everett sends both Huck Finn and his friend, reintroduced as James, down the Mississippi River as he pokes holes in the 1884 novel and paints the original protagonist's companion as a perceptive observer of danger, humanity, and language.

2. WE WERE THE UNIVERSE

Leaving her young daughter and husband at home in Texas, Kit goes on a retreat with her best friend in Montana. The getaway is fun, until a drunken night suddenly reminds Kimberly King Parsons' overwhelmed protagonist of her dead sister Julie. When she returns home, Kit feels Julie's presence everywhere, and her world begins to warp.

3. BEAUTYLAND

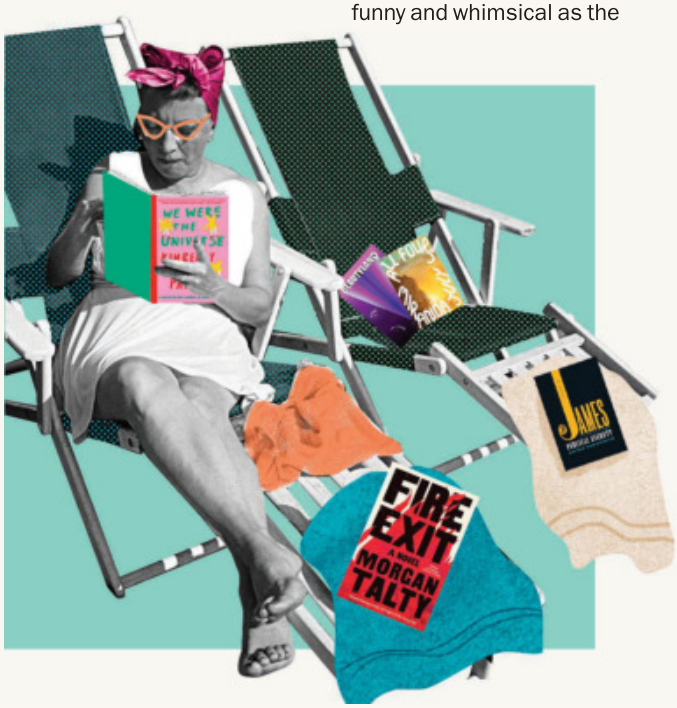
Raised by a single mother, Adina Giorno enjoys a childhood marked by the usual things (going to school, making friends), as well as an uncanny ability to communicate with extraterrestrial life via a fax machine. As Adina grows, she reports on the people she observes with a clarity that is often hilarious. Through Adina's eyes, Marie-Helene Bertino unveils a sweet and strange exploration on what it means to be human.

4. FIRE EXIT

For years, Charles has kept a watchful eye over his daughter, who lives on the nearby Penobscot Reservation and has no idea her father is a white man. He catches glimpses of Elizabeth's life from his porch across the river and yearns to know her. When she suddenly disappears, Charles decides to take matters in Morgan Talty's haunting book about heritage and belonging.

5. ALL FOURS

Miranda July's second novel begins as a 45-year-old woman leaves her child and husband at home in Los Angeles to go on a cross-country drive to New York City. But less than an hour outside of town, she pulls off the freeway and into a motel, where an unexpected love affair with a younger man steers her thrillingly off course.



6. MARTYR!

Stumbling through his days as a hospital actor, Cyrus travels to the Brooklyn Museum, where a terminally ill artist has put herself on display. Cyrus, recently sober and obsessed with death, has lived a life punctuated by loss, beginning as a baby when his mother perished in a plane crash. Kaveh Akbar pulls these characters closer together in a story that is both a multigenerational family saga and a portrait of a young man attempting to make sense of life.

7. THE BOOK OF LOVE

In Kelly Link's debut novel, three teenagers are resurrected from the dead and given the chance to return to their lives—but they can't all stay for good. The trio is tasked with completing magical tasks in order to earn a place back in their sleepy Massachusetts town. *The Book of Love* is funny and whimsical as the characters harness fantastical powers, yet it's also grounded in one of life's ultimate truths: everyone eventually runs out of time, even if we can evade the inevitable for a little while.

8. GHOSTROOTS

Across 12 short stories, 'Pemi Aguda asks how we can move forward while being reminded of the past. In a collection brimming with unsettling energy, characters combat ghosts of all shapes and sizes—a woman is horrified when she finds her daughter's face is being overtaken by that of her abusive mother, and an architect is tasked with remodeling a home that keeps changing because of the spirits trapped within its walls.

9. THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Is there a plot in Aysegul Savas' novel? Technically, yes, but it's not really the point. What makes this slim read sing are the intricately drawn ways the husband and wife at its center spend their time with neighbors, friends, and family members. As they view apartments and imagine different futures for themselves, Savas crafts a remarkable narrative about the ordinary moments that fill our lives.

10. THE COIN

A stylish Palestinian schoolteacher navigates a cramped New York City, where she's obsessing over the large inheritance she can't access. As chaos consumes her, she vies for control, attempting to cleanse herself of the ways American culture is taking a toll on her. Yasmin Zaher's anxious protagonist becomes addicted to purging herself of filth as she detaches from reality.

NONFICTION

1. THE BARN

In 1955, two white men were charged with the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, a Black boy in Mississippi. In his revelatory book, Wright Thompson digs through the details of a whitewashed history, homing in on the barn where the murder took place. *The Barn* combines Thompson's years of research with his own personal connection to the American South.

2. FI

The summer before her 50th birthday, Alexandra Fuller suffered the unimaginable: her 21-year-old son, Fi, died in his sleep. The seemingly random nature of this tragedy—Fi was young and mostly healthy—rocked Fuller to her core. In lush prose, the author reflects on how she showed up for her surviving daughters and navigated their shared heartbreak together.

3. SOLDIERS AND KINGS

A riveting work of narrative nonfiction, Jason De León's book provides a window into the world of smugglers, known as coyotes, who guide Central American migrants across the border to the U.S. For seven years, De León followed smugglers and migrants as they journeyed through Mexico. With an unwavering hand, the author describes their plight and their humanity.

4. THE LUCKY ONES

As a teenager in 2002, Zara Chowdhary was living in India when a train fire in Godhra killed dozens of Hindu pilgrims. For the three months that followed, the 16-year-old and her family, along with thousands of other Muslims, lived in fear as sectarian violence broke out and transformed the country. *The Lucky Ones* recounts this time in all of its atrocities, underlining how the promise of democracy fails to account for those who need it most.

5. THE LIGHT EATERS

Journalist Zoë Schlanger reminds us of a common truth that we tend to take for granted: plants are remarkable. Behind each stage of development in their lives is a complex system, one that she describes in awe-inspiring detail. Combining research with her own personal stories, the author illuminates why plants are so vital to our ecosystem and asks pressing questions about the relationship between humans and natural life.

6. WHISKEY TENDER

What does it mean to really belong? It's the question at the center of Deborah Jackson Taffa's stirring memoir, which explores the author's relationship with her mixed-tribe Native identity. She tells stories of survival, from how her grandparents endured Indian boarding schools to her own tumultuous coming of age, living on and off a reservation.

7. KNIFE

When Salman Rushdie was attacked onstage in Chautauqua, N.Y., in 2022 by a man with a knife, he felt the inevitability of a moment he had feared, thanks to a fatwa issued by Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini over his 1988 book *The Satanic Verses*. With great honesty and in gripping detail, Rushdie recounts that terrifying day and his journey to recovery.

8. THERE'S ALWAYS THIS YEAR

Structured like quarters in a basketball game, Hanif Abdurraqib's *There's Always This Year* centers on his love for the sport and what it means to go home after achieving success. He describes growing up in 1990s Columbus, just as fellow Ohioan LeBron James was coming up. In lyrical prose, he circles in on James' performance on the court, questioning why some Black men are deemed exceptional, and what happens to those who aren't.

9. GRIEF IS FOR PEOPLE

In 2019, twin crises hit Sloane Crosley back-to-back. First, her apartment was burglarized, and many of her prized possessions stolen. Then, just a month later, her mentor and close friend died by suicide. These losses lie at the center of the author's unsparing memoir, which dissects this period and its aftermath.

10. THE FRIDAY AFTERNOON CLUB

In his memoir, actor and producer Griffin Dunne offers an inside look at his privileged life in a world where he was friends with Carrie Fisher, worked with Martin Scorsese, and hung out with his aunt Joan Didion. But for all the glamour that fills *The Friday Afternoon Club,* there's a tragedy that anchors it. In 1982, the author's sister Dominique was strangled. Dunne unspools a compassionate portrait of his fractured family.

FROM LEFT: IVAN DMITRI—MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS WARE—KEYSTONE FEATURES/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

ALBUMS

BY STEPHEN KEARSE

1. *LIVES OUTGROWN,* BETH GIBBONS

Singer Beth Gibbons hasn't released much music in the 30 years since her iconic band Portishead stormed out of the gate with seminal trip-hop record *Dummy*. Nor has she spoken to the press much, gaining a reputation for intense privacy. But she's not necessarily the hermit these habits suggest. Her second solo album, a collection of baroque chamber folk, explores mortality with striking verve. It's a deeply interior record, abuzz with images and thoughts that feel born of rumination and experience. The bustling arrangements—which frequently feature layers of strings, percussion, and woodwinds—surge and swell as Gibbons sings of her aging body and home life. Where the languid rhythms of trip-hop soundtrack the feeling of eternal night, that blissful postclub chill, this record inhabits the charged peace of knowing that all nights, and days, must end.

2. *TIGERS BLOOD,* WAXAHATCHEE

After four albums of gauzy indie rock, Alabama-born singer Katie Crutchfield turned to folk and country for *Saint Cloud,* her fifth record. The change of pace, rooted in both a sense of homecoming and her recent embrace of sobriety, recalibrated her songwriting and widened her audience. She further refines those heartland sounds on *Tigers Blood,* a stunning set of easygoing down-home tunes cataloging the travails and charms of mid-30s living. The rhythm section, helmed by multi-instrumentalist Brad Cook, works wonders, flickering and flaring in tandem with Crutchfield's mighty but nimble voice. "Oh, when that siren blows, rings out all over town," she sings on the title track. Indeed.

3. *I LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR YOU,* JPEGMAFIA

Producer and rapper Jpegmafia makes hyperactive songs that jitter and rumble like an overloaded washing machine. Beat switches are common, samples get sourced from anywhere, and the rapping is variously smooth, abrasive, and stoned. He slows down a bit on his fifth album, which finds him processing the recoil of working with his controversial idol, Ye (f.k.a. Kanye West), on the album *Vultures 1.* The songs are muscular and syncretic as ever, but the normally peevish rapper doesn't maintain his trolling energy for the full record, settling into a questioning and pensive pace. This in turn opens up the music, changing it from a bludgeon to a balm. Jpeg doesn't reconcile these two modes, but with repeat listens they feel less polar, facets of a single mind.

4. *WHAT NOW,* BRITTANY HOWARD

There's no question mark in the title of Brittany Howard's second solo album since going on hiatus from the Alabama Shakes in 2018. The multi-instrumentalist and singer sets out to make a statement with this swinging set of funk, pop, soul, and rock tracks. Leaving behind the intimate storytelling of her debut, she lets the music take charge, showcasing her skill as an arranger with richly layered rhythms and melodies. The music never feels overstuffed, though, its profusion in service of the searching writing, which often examines the fragility of love. Don't dare ask her what next.

5. *BRAT,* CHARLI XCX

What if a pop record were constructed like a Myspace page? That's the simple but genius premise of Charli XCX's *Brat,* a kaleidoscopic dance album that revels in the freedoms of living messily. The British singer doesn't have a golden voice, killer choreography, or a Grammy, but she's indelibly cool. And her coolness isn't just a pose; it's true taste—a hankering for the very specific melodies, phrases, and beats that rouse her. In brattiness, Charli unlocks her inner paranoiac, mean girl, and so much more, a palette that further enlivens the restless electronic music she's long championed. The richness of the brat persona and the immediacy of the songwriting turned the album into a zeitgeist event, but that massive success is secondary to the record's idiosyncratic purview. *Brat* offers a 360 view of the scenes, experiences, and sounds Charli holds dear. So stylish.

6. *MY METHOD ACTOR,* NILUFER YANYA

If Nilufer Yanya decided to put down her guitar and pursue a career as a vocalist, most of her fans probably wouldn't protest. She's got a voice of velvet: rich, full, colorful. But the British singer-songwriter is also an accomplished strummer, and she spends her third album proving how essential the instrument is to her angsty songs of young love and adulthood. Co-written entirely with electronic producer Will Archer, *My Method Actor* does more with less, finding strength in restrained melodies and subdued vocals that heighten the tension of her songwriting.

7. *ABSOLUTE ELSEWHERE*, BLOOD INCANTATION

Blood Incantation's third album is technically two songs divided into three tracks each, but good luck holding any number in your head as these arrangements blast you through space-time. The Denver death-metal quartet rip through drone, prog rock, and ambient across the dense, riveting album, which is perpetually in transition. Technically, the music is about the obliteration of human consciousness upon coming into contact with an alien text, and that zany premise is the appeal. Moments of stillness build into lysergic riffs, which beget gnarlier riffs before simmering into a synth-driven calm that gathers energy for the next detonation. For Blood Incantation, the metal mandate to seek extremity is joyously open-ended, freeing them to explore quietude as often as ruckus. Into the Stargate!

8. *PLEASE DON'T CRY*, RAPSODY

Rapsody is one of rap's premier lyricists, but on her fourth album, she flexes new muscles. Inspired by her idol Lauryn Hill, the North Carolina rapper emphasizes expression over wit, reflecting on her life and career over rich blends of R&B, soul, and reggae. She's an accomplished storyteller and spends much of the album, which is framed as a poignant therapy session, unspooling experiences as mundane as vacationing and as charged as watching a beloved relative lose their memory. It's her best music yet, and her pen remains potent. While her snappy lyrics structure these songs of reflection and self-care, her deep arsenal of flows, intonations, and melodies bring them to life.

9. *NIGHT REIGN*, AROOJ AFTAB

Night ripples with possibility and wonder on composer and singer Arooj Aftab's fourth solo album. A technician of texture and negative space, Aftab crafts gorgeous arrangements where soft tones and harmonies sound intense despite the calm of the music. Influenced by a childhood spent between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, a formal musical education at Berklee College of Music, and a young adulthood in New York, she pulls from many traditions. The songwriting spans classical Hindustani and Western music, with lyrics from Aftab as well as an 18th century poem and a jazz standard. Aftab's not exactly a classicist, though. Her eclectic compositions—one of which features a very modern dose of Auto-Tune—evoke film noir, trip-hop, and *Love Deluxe*–era Sade. For Aftab, night is a melting pot.

10. *MALEGRÍA*, REYNA TROPICAL

One of the founding members of this Los Angeles–based Latin act didn't live to see the release of its debut album: Nectali "Sumo" Diaz, who formed the duo with guitarist and surviving member Fabiola Reyna in 2016, died in an accident in 2022. The music nonetheless feels warm and triumphant. Reyna, backed by a few producers, leads a humid romp through the dance cultures of the Latin diaspora, melding bouncy polyrhythms, syrupy melodies, and field recordings of birds and moving water. The album title is a Spanish word for "bad happiness," a reference to both the sad circumstances of the album's creation and the broader coexistence of joy and pain. This is music for dancing away the grief and lingering inside it.

ILLUSTRATION BY NATALIE NELSON FOR TIME; SOURCE IMAGES: YANYA: STEVE JENNINGS—GETTY IMAGES; JPEGMAFIA: MARK HORTON—GETTY IMAGES; AROOJ: JEFF KRAVITZ—FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES

THE BEST OF CULTURE 2024

PODCASTS

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

1. HYSTERICAL

The most engrossing podcast Dan Taberski has produced since *Missing Richard Simmons*, *Hysterical* investigates a mysterious illness that spread among high school girls in Le Roy, N.Y., beginning in 2011, in what is believed to be the largest case of mass hysteria since the Salem witch trials. The scandal occurred near Taberski's hometown, and he's able to bring a local charm to his color commentary and interviews, keeping what could be a dour show relatively light.

2. THE LONELY ISLAND & SETH MEYERS PODCAST

Celebrities' recaps of their own shows tend to be self-indulgent and not especially analytical. This is an exception. Seth Meyers teases insightful and hilarious stories out of his former *Saturday Night Live* co-workers Andy Samberg, Jorma Taccone, and Akiva Schaffer, about the process of writing joke songs about, say, the kind of presents not normally wrapped in boxes. The podcast lands at an existential moment for *SNL* on the eve of its 50th anniversary. Some 20 years ago, the Lonely Island dragged *SNL* into the YouTube era. Perhaps there are lessons to be gleaned from this throwback show about the future of comedy.

3. THE WONDER OF STEVIE

Pulitzer Prize–winning cultural critic Wesley Morris tackles the career of iconic musician Stevie Wonder with a little help from guests Barack and Michelle Obama. The show begins in 1972 and traces the next half decade in the musician's career, during which he won 12 Grammys. Morris is able to succinctly divine meaning from Wonder's art in this joyful celebration of an icon.

4. HYPERFIXED

Reply All alum Alex Goldman is back with a help-desk-style podcast. Goldman bills himself as an "overconfident idiot" who tries to find solutions to listener problems. Episodes unfold in unexpected ways: One in which he tries to teach a woman to drive evolves into a reflection on his own experience in an accident. It's a charming and addictive show.

5. EMPIRE CITY

This podcast about the history of the NYPD begins with audio from a disturbing video shot by the police surveilling host Chenjerai Kumanyika's father, a civil rights activist. Kumanyika interweaves personal narrative with rigorous research on the history of policing in New York, beginning with officers earning payments by kidnapping free Black men and women in the city and shipping them south to be enslaved, to demonstrate how trust eroded between the police and the people they're sworn to protect.

6. MODERN LOVE

The long-running podcast based on the popular New York *Times* column experimented with a new format for its 20th anniversary. Host Anna Martin asked famous guests to read essays and then spoke with them about their chosen work's amorous themes. It's rare to hear guarded people open up, but something about narrating love stories preps these celebs for honesty—none more so than Andrew Garfield, a heart-on-his-sleeve actor whose viral episode brought many to tears.

7. 99% INVISIBLE: THE POWER BROKER

The pre-eminent podcast on design celebrated the 50th anniversary of Robert Caro's Pulitzer-winning Robert Moses biography, *The Power Broker,* with a book club. Hosts Roman Mars and Elliott Kalan invite guests like columnist Jamelle Bouie and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to talk about the legacy of the city planner who had a greater impact on the trajectory of New York City than anyone else in history.

8. MY SO-CALLED MIDLIFE

Midlife is often marked by crisis, and host Reshma Saujani feels ready to blow up her monotonous existence as she stares down 50. On this show, she brings an almost pleading vulnerability to conversations with accomplished women like Emmy winner Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, who offer life tips and guidance on finding happiness.

9. THINGS FELL APART

Jon Ronson chronicles the culture wars by connecting the dots between isolated incidents and larger movements. Each episode asks a question, like, "How does a chance encounter at a yacht club between a sick girl's parents and a bartender spark COVID vaccine conspiracy theories?" The listener comes away with a greater understanding of why we've lost a shared notion of truth.

10. FINALLY! A SHOW ABOUT WOMEN . . .

In each episode, a different woman in a fascinating circumstance records a day in her normal life; they include an 80-something pinup girl shopping for vibrators and a telehealth abortion provider who works for the Satanic Temple. The show celebrates women—whatever their specific experiences may be.

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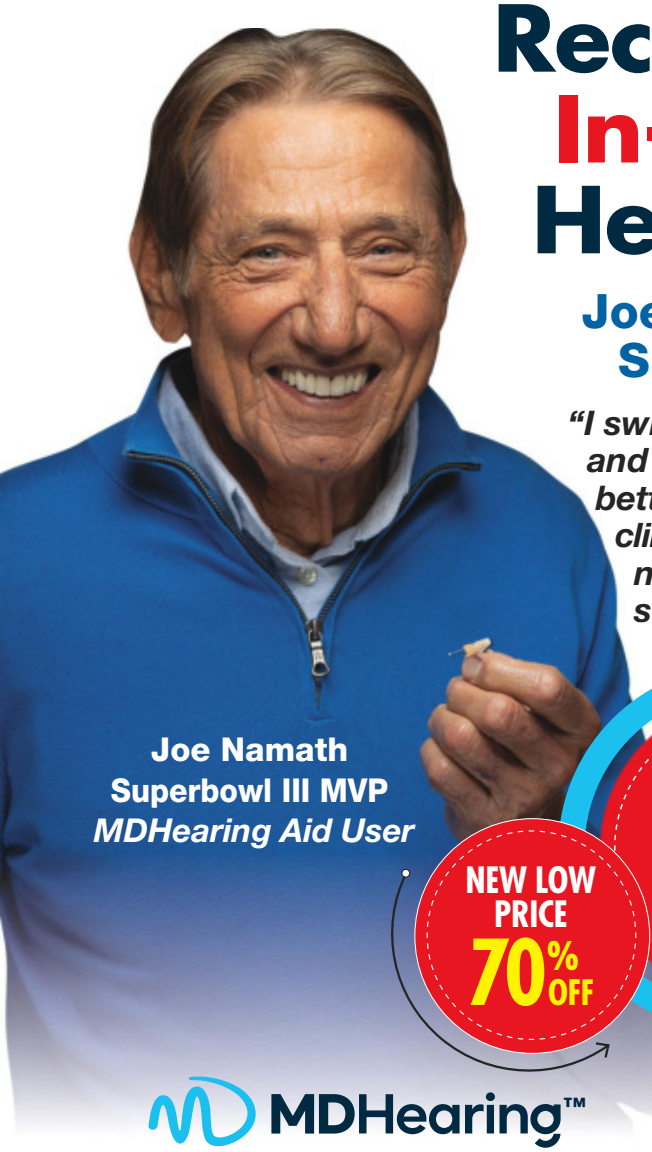

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